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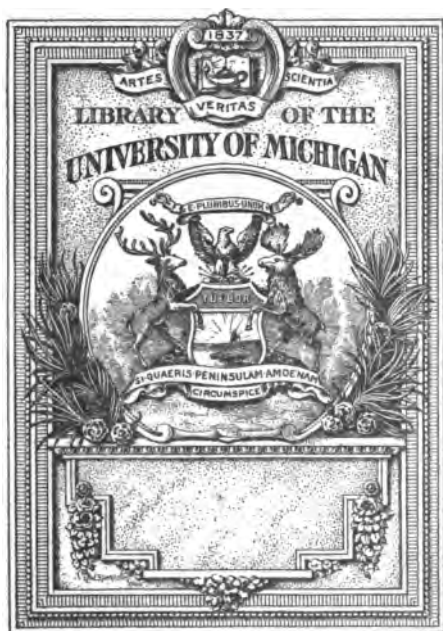
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QUEEN ELIZABETH



QUEEN ELIZABETH

AN HISTORICAL DRAMA

IN FOUR ACTS

BY

W. G. HOLE

AUTHOR OF "POEMS LYRICAL AND DRAMATIC"



LONDON

GEORGE BELL AND SONS

1904

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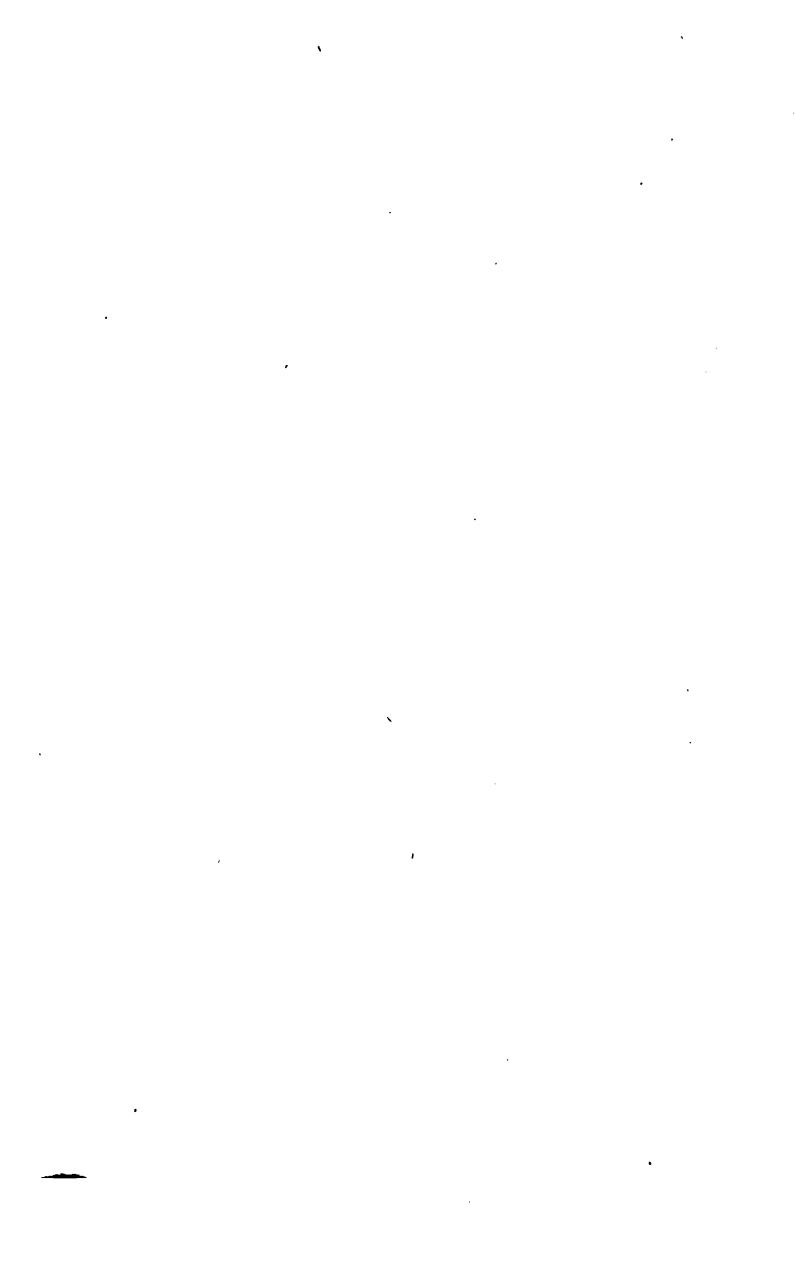
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TO MY FRIEND
RAYMOND BLATHWAYT

135498



NOTE

THE drama of Queen Elizabeth's reign is so vast; the stage is so crowded; so many actors have strong parts, play them and make their final exits long before the last scene is reached, that no apology seems necessary on the part of the author for having freely availed himself of the licence permitted to the dramatist in dealing with historical facts and dates, especially as this play is intended for the stage rather than for the study.

The main departure from historical reality will be found in connection with the Earl of Leicester's marriage with the Lady Douglas Sheffield, which took place some years earlier than the period covered by the interval between Acts II. and III., and was not concealed from the Queen so successfully, and for so long a time, as represented. Elizabeth's infatuation for Leicester is matter of common historical knowledge, and there can be little question that it was his untimely death (which took place a few days after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, but as to the exact scene of which authorities differ), rather than the remonstrances of her Council, which prevented her from conferring upon him the title of "Lieutenant

NOTE

General of England and Ireland." The further intention disclosed in her speech in the last scene is, the author opines, neither dramatically improbable nor out of keeping with his conception of this great Queen's character.

NEWTON ABBOT,
September, 1904.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ROBERT DUDLEY, EARL OF LEICESTER,
 WILLIAM CECIL, LORD BURLEIGH,
 LORD CHARLES HOWARD OF EFFING-
 HAM, Lord Admiral,
 LORD HUNSDON,
 LORD COBHAM,
 LORD DERBY,
 SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM,
 SIR NICHOLAS BACON, Lord Keeper of the
 Great Seal,
 SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON, Lord Chan-
 cellor,
 SIR JOHN HARRINGTON, a Cousin to the
 Queen,
 MR. SECRETARY DAVISON,

Members
 of
 Her Majesty's
 Council.

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE.

SIR JAMES KNOLLYS, an old Soldier and Captain of the Queen's
 Body-Guard.

CLODD, the Queen's Jester.

MASTER LANEHAM, Keeper of the Council Chamber Door.

POTTS, a Vintner.

Speaker and Members of the House of Commons.

Two Workmen.

Beefeaters.

Courtiers.

Attendants.

Messengers.

Heralds.

Soldiers.

Mariner.

QUEEN ELIZABETH.

LADY DOUGLAS SHEFFIELD, a Lady in Waiting on the
Queen, afterwards Countess of Leicester.

LADY MARY GREVILLE, a Lady in Waiting on the Queen.

MISTRESS BARTON, of the Strand.

Ladies in Waiting.

Maids of Honour.

Attendants on Queen.

J

QUEEN ELIZABETH

ACT I.

SCENE I. *The Palace at Greenwich. A State Apartment.*

LORDS HOWARD *and* HUNSDON, SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM, SIR NICHOLAS BACON *and* SIR JOHN HARRINGTON, *members of Her Majesty's Council.*

Howard.

HER MAJESTY, I take it, is aware
Upon what business we have sought an audience;
Sir John, you know her mind as well as any?

Harrington. Lord Howard, I thank you for your flattering speech,

Yet, since you ask me, I'll make bold to say—
All listening chinks and watchful key-holes stopped—
That neither I nor any man can know
What she knows not herself.

Howard. [*Hotly.*] I would but learn
If you have taken opportunity
To give her any hint.

Harrington. The Lord forbid!

Hunsdon. See here we stand, five proper men and
bold,

QUEEN ELIZABETH

A-tremble lest her grace's farthingale
Should rustle in the passage ere arrives
Our spokesman, Burleigh.

Howard. [*Impatiently.*] What delays him then?

[*They look anxiously at one another.*]

Walsm. My Lord of Burleigh will be here anon.

Hunsdon. Yet if he fail us we be all lost men,
Save you, Lord Howard, will face her Majesty,
And bid her in the nation's name to marry.

Har. I thank the Fates a simple gentleman
Can scarce be called upon to thrust bare arms
Into this hornets' nest.

Howard. Truth! 'tis not place,
Honour nor dignity, that marks out men
For such a thankless task. If Burleigh fail
We must postpone the audience.

Bacon. Hark! who comes?

Har. Her Majesty, I warrant. [*They listen anxiously.*]

Enter BURLEIGH.

Hunsdon. God be praised!

Burl. My lords, the Queen receives us on the instant;
But ere she comes permit me to recall
Our business to your minds.

Howard. You well might spare
Your breath, my lord. We've thought of nothing else.

Burl. So much the better, for the time has come
To tell her fearlessly the thing we think,
And prove the thing we think the thought of all.

ACT I SCENE I

The Commons a fortnight since appealed to her
To make the peace of England sure by marrying.
She in reply demurely asked the Speaker
If he found peace therein, and since all know
His wife a scam-tongued scold, they stood confused,
And presently withdrew. One thing gives hope:
The Earl of Leicester, sworn with self-conceit,
Has dared the step too far which lands him deeper
Than that mean depth he climbed from, and the Queen
Has banished him from the Court.

Howard.

Then it was true!

This upstart Leicester saw alone in her
Her mother's daughter, till her father's spoke,
And bade him stand aside for better men.

*Enter ELIZABETH, attended by ladies, who assist her
to her seat.*

Eliz. My lords, is 't news of ill? Why, is it so ill
That you stand tongue-tied, Burleigh?

Burl.

News, your grace,

We have not yet of ill, but to prevent it
Is the grave business we would fain discuss.
Here you behold the men who have at heart
Your kingdom's weal; who, though in minor matters
They see the general good with different eyes,
Are on this point, all difference sunk, as one.
Whence, speaking for myself, I speak for all.

Eliz. My lord, if we have met to answer riddles,
I say at once, I have no love for riddles;

QUEEN ELIZABETH

The brave High Admiral gazes at the roof,
My sage Lord Keeper looks askance at nought,
And since no eyes meet mine but yours, Sir John,
Speak you, then, for the rest, and to the point.

Har. [Hastily.] Nay, nay, your Majesty, I did but dare
To meet your royal eyes as one safe-hid
Behind a hedge of insignificance.

Lord Burleigh summoned us—he is our spokesman.

Burl. Your grace, 'tis this: The peace of England
hangs

But on the thread of your most valued life.
The fear, in some the hope, that this might snap
(Which God avert), keeps ever alive the stir
Of faction in the land—the secret boil
Of black conspiracy. It yet may be,
Would you but marry, that the need will pass,
To name your heir, in natural wise.

Eliz.

Methinks

The subject is not new. You bid me marry—
Marry then will I bring ye but the man
In choice of whom, my lords, you all agree.
O, I am sick of words! Have I not risked
My queenly modesty to this same end?
Philip of Spain would have me—for my throne.
The Queen of France has dangled, one by one,
Her precious sons before me. Meekly I
Gave ear to your shrewd counsels as you praised
The little pock-marked Frenchman with his airs
And mincing graces. Spoke you from your hearts?
Have you done well? Nay, you have cheapened me

ACT I SCENE I

Dragged through the marts of Europe my fair name,
And offered, cap in hand, what men should fight for.
You should have held your Queen too rich a jewel
For any but the noblest prince to wear.
An Arch-Duke here, and there a huckstering prince—
These have you bade inspect your merchandise;
These having asked the price, and learnt the terms,
Laughed and went forth—and this for England's good?
But stay, you spoke of counsels undivided,
I do not see my Lord of Leicester here.

Burl. We did not deem my Lord of Leicester held
The lists for any party.

Howard. We, your Grace,
Give words to thoughts that rise in England's heart
With honest lips: we come to ask no favour—
The Earl of Leicester seeks but his own ends.
He is, indeed, a rudderless bark, full-sailed,
Blown here and there by every breeze of interest—
A common danger to all honest seamen
Who navigate these seas. We trust your Grace
Has seen at last this upstart's—— [*BURLEIGH checks him.*]

Eliz. Hold your peace: [*She rises.*]
You take upon yourself to judge our acts,
To weigh our words. Beware lest need arise
For us to place yours too, my lord, in balance.
Good friends, 'tis comforting to find a scapegoat,
Yet here, for once, your judgment sadly errs.
We all have done the Earl of Leicester wrong,
And I, alas, not least who knew him best.
Leicester!

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Enter LEICESTER hurriedly. He flings himself on his knees before the QUEEN. The Council show signs of disturbance and whisper together.

Leic. Your Majesty, I humbly crave
A favour.

Eliz. [*Resumes seat.*] Ha! A favour, Leicester? Speak.

Leic. Your Grace, I beg, since English skies for me
No longer hold the sun, your leave to join
The embassy that starts at dawn for France.
There I may find the chance denied me here
To serve your Majesty and England too.

Eliz. This you desire upon your oath, my lord?

Leic. Above all things, your Grace.

Eliz. Above all—Robin?

[*LEICESTER looks up with surprise at the QUEEN and is about to reply when, with an imperious gesture, she stays him.*

Well, then, my lord, we will not let you go;
We have a need for you about us here;
Indeed, upon the moment of your entry
Your name was on our tongue.

Now, hark you all;
You see him kneel—it may not always be;
May not, we say, for none have power to read,
Most sapient lords, what fate may have in store;
But this we know, that though you all agree
Wherein the evil lies and what the cause,
If one hath cure another straight sniffs out

ACT I SCENE I

In that same cure a poison. At this time
For us to speak our thought were premature;
But when all doctors differ, we, perchance,
May find a cure in bidding Leicester stand
Where now he needs must kneel.

Leicr. Your Majesty,
I am as one who, haled from dungeon gloom,
Blinks in the sunlight, hears the sound of words,
But gathers not their import. . . .

Eliz. [*Rising.*] Hark you, Rob!
The sun shines on the true and false alike,
But longest on the true.

Burl. Your Majesty——

Eliz. In faith we would put off our majesty—
Therefore, my lords, good night.

[*Exeunt omnes except* LEICESTER, BURLEIGH,
and WALSINGHAM.]

Leicr. [*Patronisingly.*] Her Majesty
Made mention that you spoke just now of me—
As great your love for me, then, so my thanks.
To you, my Lord of Burleigh, I would make
High recognition. I have marked for long
Your sterling qualities, your loyal service;
And seeing, as you, some danger in that the Queen,
Lacking a husband, wields the nation's sword
With too unready, shrinking womanly hands,
I tell you frankly that her will, expressed
In plainest speech—you heard it, both of you—
To take me as her consort, shall by me
Be bowed to loyally, though with deepest sense

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Of my unworthiness. Your furtherance, then,
I pray in this, and I'll link hands with you
And take as mine own part that your deserts
Most amply are rewarded.

Burl. Thanks, my lord,
The service we have rendered you was done
With eye to no reward.

[BURLEIGH *retires*. WALSINGHAM *detains him*
at door and speaks hurriedly in dumb show.

BURLEIGH *makes affirmative sign, then exit.*

Walsm. [*Approaching* LEICESTER.] Nay, this is truth.
We had no definite plan, save to insist
On need of settlement. Had we done else—
Made smooth your path—she had found obstacle;
But in the lack of aught wherewith to quarrel
She ran to what she would.

Leicr. Ah, Walsingham,
You would belittle the favour you have done me.

Walsm. If we did aught, 'twas but with clumsy hands
To add some fuel to the fire——

Leicr. Was that, then, nought?

Walsm. [*Coming close to* LEICESTER.] Nought in com-
parison, my lord, with what
We yet may do in furtherance of your suit,
But——

Leicr. Is there, then, a “but”?

Walsm. Do men make kings
For nought, good Earl?

Leicr. I should have known myself
That nothing pays for nothing.

ACT I SCENE I

Walsm. Ay, my lord,
And, to be frank, the hand we take in ours
Not only must receive.

Leicr. What would you, pray?

Walsm. The welfare of the nation and the Queen.
One ill is plain—the Queen's unwedded state:
This you would have us look to you to cure.
Another ill—a very present danger,
And bloody menace—is the Scottish Mary.
Here, too, your part might well be that of healer;
Till now your cue has been, with eye to favour,
Blind to the Queen's true interest and her people's—
I pray you pardon me, but plainest words
Make shortest speech—to fight or ridicule
As reasonless revenge, our policy
That would with fearless cautery heal up
The sore whereby our England bleeds to death.
We hold the Queen of Scots a prisoner,
Even if we would we dare not let her go:
And while she lives—

Leicr. Must I join voice with them
Who clamour for her death?

Walsm. No need to clamour;
A whisper—'twere enough. The Queen herself
Knows well what knife alone will cut the knot,
And does but hesitate to speak the word.
I say no more. This is the secret key
That opens the gate to your ambition; we—
You know it well—are they who keep the gate.

Leicr. But Walsingham—

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Walsm. My lord, I ask no promise.
Yet, truth, a crown were not too dearly bought
Whose price was but to make its safety sure.
I pray you give the matter thought. Your leave. [*Exit.*]

Leicr. I know Sir Francis Walsingham of old,
And Burleigh. These be men whom kings love not.
They think to make me puppet in their hands,
Dexterously danced on a string. But he who climbs,
The top once gained, oft kicks the ladder down—
I needs must have a ladder.

Enter CLODD.

Clodd. Hail, my lord.
Her Majesty hath wearied of poor Clodd,
And now she calls for Leicester. You and I
Pull at one cart together.

Leicr. What means this?

Clodd. Since I found comfort in philosophy
'Tis seldom I obscure my words with meaning.
Are you a philosopher, good Brother Rob?

Leicr. I would I were.

Clodd. A laudable ambition,
Not hard to win. Say, why do I love philosophy?

Leicr. I cannot guess.

Clodd. Because I am a fool.
A fool, my lord, who barter his small wit
For meed of sovereign smiles. But I forget,
I have been sent post-haste to summon you,
The Queen hath smiles for you as well, my lord!

ACT I.

SCENE II. *The QUEEN'S private apartments. LADY DOUGLAS SHEFFIELD and LADY MARY GREVILLE seated. Maids of Honour laughing and romping in background.*

Lady Sheffield. How often has the same been said before?

Lady Mary. This time, indeed, 'tis true. My cousin Fulk

Heard all, and now my Lord of Leicester weaned
Of his ambition seeks to trim his sails
For France.

Lady Sheffield. For France?

Lady Mary. To-night he makes request,
Which in her present mood the Queen will grant,
To join the embassy that leaves for Paris.

Lady Sheffield. [*As if speaking to herself.*] 'Twere best
to slip a chain which holds him fast
To such dishonour.

Lady Mary. Nay, 'twas no dishonour;
The game was long, the stakes were high: he played
With skill and patience.

Lady Sheffield. Thinkest thou he played
With one who risked an equal stake?

Lady Mary. In truth
He did not, for the Queen staked heart and crown:
He but the semblance of a heart.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Enter SIR JAMES KNOLLYS, *who gazes indignantly at the noisy Maids of Honour.*

Lady Mary. Here comes
Our master usher. Pray you, ladies, hush.

[The Maids of Honour greet him with laughter.

Lady Sheffield. I fear, Sir James, our noise disturbs
your studies. *[Exit* SIR JAMES, *shaking his head.*

Lady Mary. But now my Lord of Leicester—

*[The Maids overturn a piece of furniture, where-
upon re-enter* SIR JAMES *with a book in his
hand.*

Sir James. Ladies, fie,
Such romps and gambols, such unseemly noise,
Do best befit a Bedlam. Who would think
To see you skip and hey and frisk about,
That you are maids of honour to the Queen?
In my young days a birch had put an end
To such unseemly doings.

[They laugh at him from behind chairs, etc.

Maid of Honour. Good Sir James,
I pray you birch us not.

Sir James. That yet may come;
But since it seems you lack instruction most,
I'll give you some.

*[He walks up centre of stage reading in a loud
voice from Tacitus. As he turns the QUEEN
enters and gazes with surprise at the scene.
The Maids emerge in confusion, but* SIR
JAMES, *intent on his book, continues his*

ACT I SCENE II

*reading, and again marching up the stage,
almost walks against the QUEEN.*

Your Majesty!

Eliz.

I fear

We do intrude upon a comedy,
Or on a novel wooing. Pray, Sir James,
Continue to the end.

Sir James.

Your Majesty,

I had it in my mind to give your ladies
Somewhat of weight to think on.

Maid of Hon.

Fie, Sir James!

You read us Latin. What know we of Latin?
We did, indeed, at random catch a word
As thus, "amo," "amas," and deeming yours
A tale that were not best in English told,
We ran away and hid our blushing cheeks.

Sir James. [Indignantly.] I do protest, your Majesty.

The words

Are those of Tacitus: pray you but hark——

Eliz. Nay, nay, Sir James, we will have nought of
Tacitus.

While, as for blushes, faith we saw them not. [*To Maid.*
If you will give us favour of a reading [*To SIR JAMES.*
From Ovid's "Art of Love"——

Sir James. [Angrily.]

That will I not——

I pray you pardon me. The art of love
Needs little study; that, your Grace, of war——

[*He adjusts his spectacles, and re-opens book.*

Eliz. Sir James, you shall expound that dreadful art
At some more fitting season.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

*Enter LEICESTER and CLODD. LADY DOUGLAS
SHEFFIELD starts with surprise.*

Good, my lord;
Had you come earlier you had heard Sir James
Giving us lessons in the art of love,
Wherein he is most learned.

[SIR JAMES *makes signs of dissent.*

Leicr. Yet your Grace
In that can need no teaching. What are words
Upon a teacher's tongue to such instruction
As beauty gives without a word at all!

Eliz. I do not call to mind such words in Ovid.

Sir James. May't please your Majesty, the "Art of Love"
Contains no such allusion.

Eliz. Ah, Sir James!
You knew just now no art save that of war—
Most truly men call you a philosopher.

Clodd. Why, here's another, Rob.

Eliz. I caught not that.

Clodd. Then heaven be praised, your Majesty, for I,
Catching the prevalent spirit of the time,
Say things whereof who would the meaning find
Must seek it as a schoolboy with a pin
Works out the invisible winkle.

Eliz. Hark thee, Clodd,
Who reasons with a fool must use a rod.

Clodd. Then Rob and I should both be black and blue.

Eliz. Enough. [*Turns to LEICESTER.*] I feel to-night
so light of heart,

ACT I SCENE II

I might have drunken of the magic draught
Of youth's renewal.

Leicr. Then must your Grace, indeed,
Speak from the mirror's evidence. This morn
Myself had rather drunk of Lethe's cup,
For hope was dead, and memory but a load
The sooner slipped the better.

Eliz. Thirst you still?

Leicr. Your Majesty, I thirst, but fain would drink
A more impossible draught.

Eliz. Impossible?

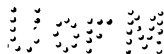
Leicr. Ay, I have wandered through enchanted woods
So long and wearily, deceived so oft,
That now when once again I seem to see
Through tangled deeps the fountain of my quest,
And hear its sweet provocative of thirst,
Alas! my courage fails.

Eliz. Then you must thirst
If having found the well you dare not drink. [*Moves away.*
But bid the music play. Sir James, not oft
The knight disports him in the ladies' bower.
You too will join us.

Sir James. Pray, your Majesty,
'Tis many a year since last I walked a measure,
'Twill but make food for jest. Now war——

Eliz. Nay, nay,
No war . . . My lord——

[*They dance—the QUEEN with great agility. At
the conclusion LEICESTER leads her to her
seat. She detains him.*



QUEEN ELIZABETH

Eliz. Why, Robin, what's amiss?
Sad must your heart be if your face speaks true.

Leicr. You read me right, yet, blame me not, your
Grace;

I am as one who in a world of dream,
Suspects that he is dreaming. Is it true
That one short hour ago I prayed for leave
To pass for ever to that outer dark
Where shall be nevermore the eyes we seek,
Nor any voice to lure us back to love?
Or is this but the last despite of Fate
To plant me neck-deep in a sea of glory,
Face to the sun, until the inevitable wave
Shall sweep me from my foothold and I sink
To see the light no more?

Eliz. Nay, nay, not now;
We would be merry, Rob. It never was yours
To pluck away the festal wreath and peer
Upon the care beneath it. Ladies, come,
We'll dance that stately measure brought from France,
One man alone we need and he our fool.

Clodd. 'Tis but a matter, Rob, of precedence.
I am the senior—thou shalt have thy turn.

[*LEICESTER frowns. The QUEEN and her Maids
of Honour dance a slow measure, at the
conclusion of which they kneel to the fool.
SIR JAMES KNOLLYS, shaking his head,
retires.*

Eliz. And now, my lord, good night. Let not your
dreams

ACT I SCENE II

Be such as he dreams who is—faint of heart.

[LEICESTER *kneels and kisses the QUEEN's hand.*

She raises him and returns the bow with mock reverence. Then exeunt omnes, except

CLODD, who stretches himself on a couch,

LADY SHEFFIELD, and LEICESTER.

Leicr. What does this mean, this sudden turn of the wheel?

Is that within my grasp which once I sought—
The winning of the Queen? I cannot trust her;
She does but play with me for her own purpose.
And yet 'tis strange; I never knew her thus,
As though the fruit so ripe needs but a touch
To bring it down. But now it is too late;
I have, denied so long, gone past my hunger . . .
And yet, again, if she would play with me
For her own purpose, wherefore should she not
For her own purpose take me for her husband?
In truth, 'tis worth——

Lady Sheffield. [*Touching his sleeve.*] Have you no eyes, my lord?

Leicr. [*Starts.*] Dear lady, I indeed can have no eyes
If you are by and I behold you not.

Lady Sheffield. And do you thus give thanks with
moody brows
To Fortune for her gifts?

Leicr. What gifts, I pray?

Lady Shef. Must I distrust the witness of my eyes,
And still hold fast the memory of your words?

Leicr. Ah, sweetheart, you beheld and heard it all,

QUEEN ELIZABETH

And can but judge me, yet in face of proof—
This seeming proof of ears and eyes—I swear
My heart is yours no less, my love unchanged.
But Fate is greater than us all; the Queen
Wills and we must obey.

Lady Sheffield. If she should will
To bend a thing unbendable, what then?
She knew your late demand to go to France
Was but a trick in the game, which had she granted
You had, confounded, sat on Calais shore
Sick with a vain repining. You had left
Truly your heart behind!

Leicr. I swear to you
I should, indeed, have left my heart behind,
But in your keeping. Too, is not your love
The dear impediment, my one strong bar,
Upon a path so glorious that the world
Would think me mad to know wherefore I halt.

Lady Shef. What, halt for me with such a prize to win!
'Tis but a momentary dazzlement;
You have but now to place the consort crown
Upon your brow, outwear its novelty—
Granting for place what others give for love—
To learn the measure of your happiness.

Leicr. Love, what you saw was but a spin of the wheel,
Which lacks as yet full turn. Will you not trust me?

[*He approaches her.*]

Lady Sheffield. I see not why I should.

Leicr. Because I love you—
Love you in spite of all that you suspect.

ACT I SCENE II

Lady Sheffield. O, I must go, my lord, her Majesty
Will question of my absence.

Leicr. Not before——

[*He makes to embrace her, but she disengages herself.*

Lady Shef. Nay, though I cannot yet refuse my heart,
I must henceforth deny my lips to you—
Take no account of me: I am, indeed,
Of little moment; you must put aside
Such love as mine—in truth, you must, my lord;
I stand betwixt you and your high ambition,
And in your swift advance to sovereignty
You must not heed a thing so pitiful,
So little of concern beyond to-day.
Think, then, no more of me, my lord, for I
Can love so well that I can kill my love
For him who would have loved me had he dared.

Leicr. Great God! this must not be. Stay, but one
word,

I swear I will to-morrow face the Queen,
And tell her all.

Lady Sheffield. Nay, nay, my lord, farewell.

[*At the door she pauses and looks back, but
LEICESTER stands with his head bent. Then
exit.*

Leicr. Will she too force this on me? Does she see
Herein, as I, the inevitable trend of things?
Is sovereignty so near me that e'en love,
The balm of insignificance, departs,
Fearing to be familiar? Here's a touch
Of that disease which feeds on kingship.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

[Pacing across the stage, he catches sight of the Jester pretending to be asleep, and places his hand on his sword.]

Ah!

Is this, then, part and parcel of your office
To play the long ear, pilfer words and sell them?
By God, I have a mind to run thee through!

Clodd. *[Sits up, yawns, and rubs his eyes.]* I did but
rest me, having played my part.

In truth, the trade of folly is so stale,
So lacking in all novelty, and thou
So finished in its use, I felt no call
To wake and watch thee. Thou shalt sleep anon.
'Tis turn and turn about.

Leicr.

In you, indeed,

I sometimes see a striving after wit—
Some day you will achieve it. Will you swear
You were just now asleep?

Clodd.

So soundly, Rob,

I dreamt a dream—a most diverting dream.
Wilt hear it? Well, I dreamt I was an ass——

Leicr. Didst want a dream from heaven to tell thee that?

Clodd. —That stood between two heaps of provender.

Here was a truss of somewhat mouldy hay,
And here a heap of herbs most succulent—
Lush meadow grass still wet with morning dew,
Starred through with chaste-eyed daisies. 'Twixt them I
Stood swaying my silly head from side to side,
And then—and then——

Leicr.

Thou ass, which didst thou choose?

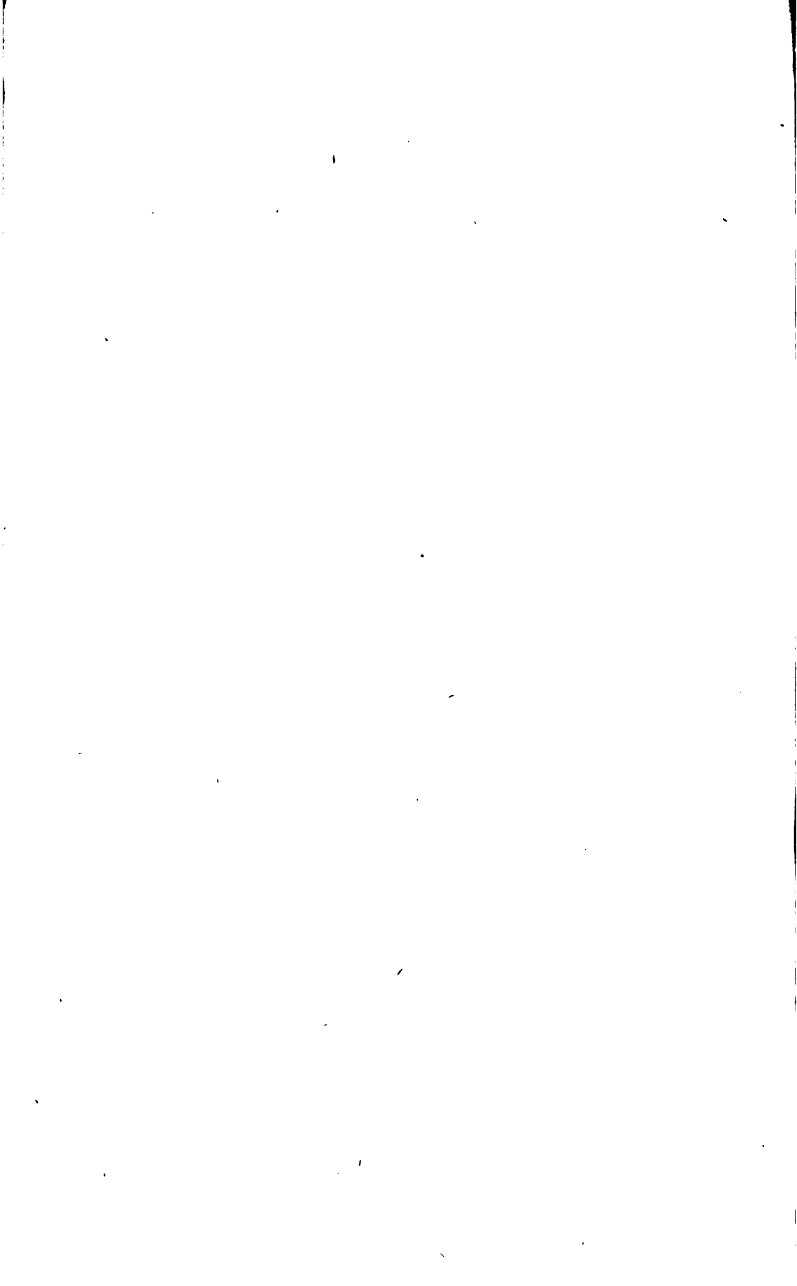
ACT I SCENE II

Clodd. Then didst thou, most misguided, wake me up,
Whereby the wisdom of the ass was lost—
A great calamity, for I, made wise
In such uncommon lore, had then become
An oracle of wondrous weight with asses.

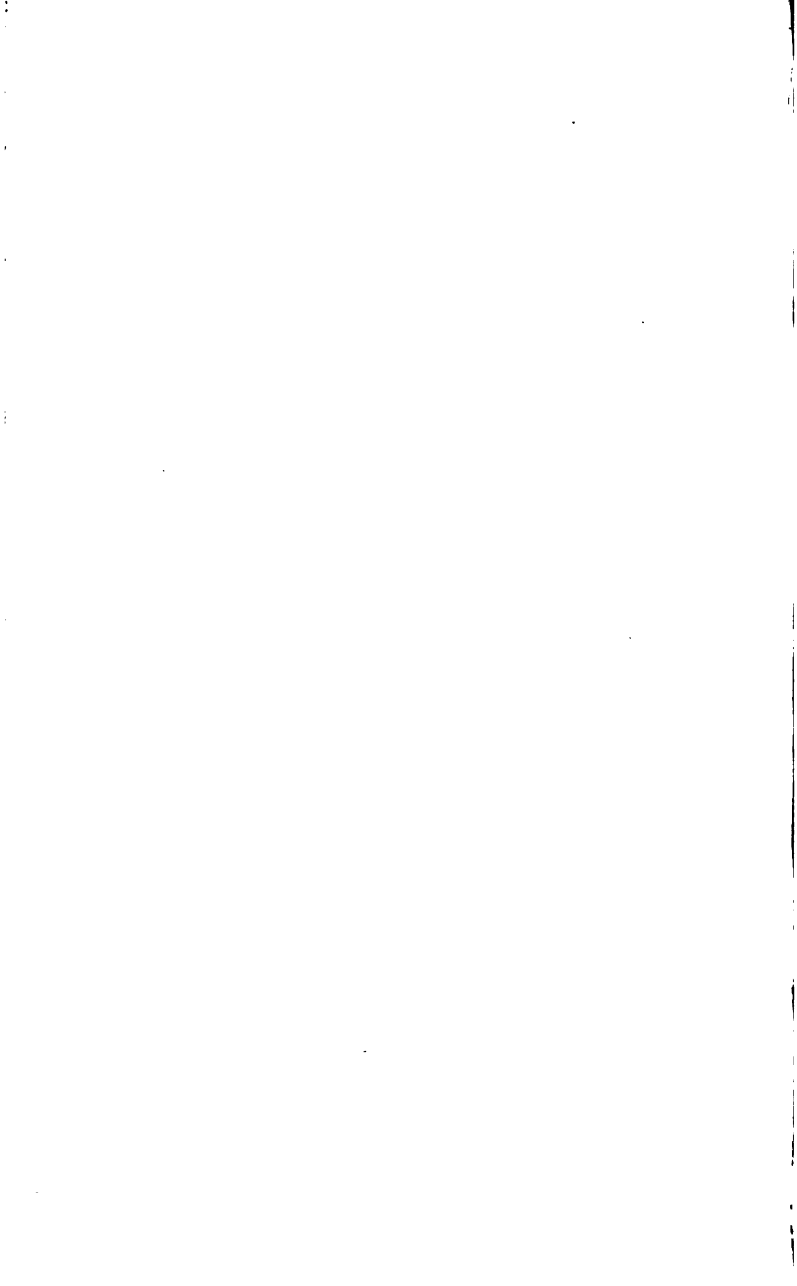
Leicr. Had I but known you dreamed to such good
purpose,
You should have dreamt in peace till ripe to join
Your brother asses of her Grace's Council. [*Exit.*

Clodd. My Lord of Leicester, ah, my Lord of Leicester!
I love a man who dreams but dare not do;
He is a book of jests closed not too soon.
On this hand stands a Queen with throne for dower,
Her price your soul's damnation; and on that
A wife to love you as he would be loved
Who stands before the world for what he is.
Yet when I hinted of an ass debating
Between stale, mouldy hay (your Grace's pardon!),
And fresh sweet meadow grass—the Lady Sheffield,
You gathered not my meaning. Ah, good Rob,
My Lord of Leicester, ah, my Lord of Leicester!

[*Laughs. Exit.*



ACT II



ACT II.

SCENE I. *The gardens of the palace at Greenwich.*

Enter LORDS BURLEIGH, HOWARD, *and* HUNSDON, SIR FRANCIS WALSHINGHAM *and* MR. SECRETARY DAVISON.

Davison.

HER Majesty with Leicester was but now
Seated upon this bank. There is a look-out
Beyond yon elms, which gives upon the river ;
There often she repairs to watch the ships
Crowd past upon the tide.

Walsm. If they be there
The chance must not be lost. Our new ally,
This crafty-amorous, amorous-crafty earl,
Shall change his coat beneath our very eyes—
We have him in our hands.

Burl. We know not yet
How far his word with the Queen has any weight.
But now, sir, lead us thither. [*Exeunt omnes.*]

Enter LEICESTER, *leading the Queen.*

Leicr. Need I more?
Last night the shadows of my prison-house—

QUEEN ELIZABETH

A tenement as wide as is the world,
Less that one place which knows thee sun and moon—
So dulled my spirit that I moved as one
Who, in his sleep half-waking, holds suspect
His dream till cock-crow. Now I am awake,
And, lo, it was no dream! The voice was thine
That called me back from hideous outer gloom;
Thine, too, the hand, and see, I dare to kiss it,
Which bade me stand where once I needs had knelt.

Eliz. Yet, Rob, if this be that thou'dst have it be,
I miss the headlong derring-do of love.
Where I lead on I do not say you halt,
But sure if love had any voice herein
You would make fearlessly demand of all—
Dare to refuse the thing the queen would give,
And snatch at that the woman could not deny.
I would I were a country-maid, or, say,
A lady in attendance on the queen,
Then I might hear the truth.

Leicr. [*Hastily.*] In this, I swear
You do me wrong. The milk-maid's trustiest guide
Is her own heart, and should she strip a grass
Of seeds with "loves me," "loves me not," her heart
Will listen to nought at last save what it will.

Eliz. Then thou dost love me and dost not, my
Rob.

This is the only answer aught can give,
Save that arbitrament I . . . dare not try.

Leicr. Dare not, Elizabeth?

Eliz. Dare not—my lord.

ACT II SCENE I

And that is why I envy country-maids,
And—ladies in attendance on the queen.

Leicr. Would that your highness were a country-maid,
And I a plough-boy; it were easier then.
A woman who by circumstance is queen
Can scarce be wooed as simple maidens are.
She, if she would, must lay aside her state,
Nor when the woman, half-subdued, takes fright,
Resume the offended queen to drive love forth.
Can I aspire to her who made me much,
Save she, forgetting all, will make me more?
My love, born long ago, ere yet your brow
Was burdened with a crown, was love no less
When for your safety and the nation's weal
I urged the suit of this or that high prince,
Deemed worthier than myself.

Eliz. [*Laughs.*] It was, indeed,
A service singular in one who loved;
And one deserving much of gratitude
In her beloved.

Leicr. O, wherefore treat with scorn
A love so strong it would not stand in the way
Of greater powers to greater ends? See now,
[*Flings himself upon his knees.*]
I purge me of my faults, say all, dare all,
Do as the plough-boy would who loves as I.
Thou art my queen—queen of my life and heart—
One word—

Eliz. Hush! hush! here comes my good dull Burleigh,
In whom behold your chiefest advocate;

QUEEN ELIZABETH

For, by the Mass, if ever I grant your suit,
'Twill be to spite him, Rob.

Enter BURLEIGH, WALSINGHAM, HOWARD, HUNSDON,
and DAVISON.

What now, my lords?

Burl. We had not dared disturb your privacy,
But that the Council, after anxious sitting,
Have bidden us lay at once before your Grace
A matter grown most urgent.

Eliz. Pray you speak.

Burl. Touching the Queen of Scots.

Eliz. God's death! my lords,
Then sure your journey here to-day is vain.

Burl. We have at various times made bold to show
Your people's deep unrest, their sleepless fear
That other hands will reap what they have sown.
These, seeing the cause and cure of all our trouble,
Demand the Scottish Queen's——

Eliz. 'Tis not our wont
To look for guidance to the rabble. Sure
Our royal sire had whipped them to their kennels——

Burl. And laid long since the enchantment in his
realm
That lured his noblest subjects one by one
Into the trap of treason? His sharp cure
Of axe and block——

Eliz. 'Sdeath, man! you would insult us.
We have foregone too long our father's cure

ACT II SCENE I

For souls rebellious. If in Mary's death
The nation's welfare lies, look not to me;
Encompass it yourselves. So get you back!

Burl. Your Majesty, I dare to disobey,
Till you have heard full reason for our coming.
We are your Grace's servants, but we serve,
As you too serve, the nation.

Eliz. What is this:

You would dictate to us?

Burl. In this, because
There comes a time when counsellors must speak,
And kings must hear, the truth. We are resolved
To suffer all indignity your Grace
May choose to place upon us—but to speak,
And to be heard.

Eliz. [*After a pause.*] Proceed then, but be brief.

Burl. To-day came confirmation of the news
From Spain that Philip had at last declared
The reason for the gathering in his ports
Of ships and gear of war. All round his coasts
The dockyards ring, and oaken forests stripped
From far sierras grow with wizard touch
To mighty galleons, a-bristle with guns, and stored
With engines of the Holy Office. These
Tug at their moorings, waiting but his word
To fly to our enslaving. To secure
Complaisance from his jealous brother kings,
He takes upon himself to right the wrongs
Of Mary Queen of Scots—which done, not quit
With thanks, he'll wed her next and claim the crown

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Through marriage and by conquest.

Eliz.

Well devised!

When Time, who judges kings inexorably,
Strips to the core this thing you'd have me do,
He'll call it murder!

Burl.

Time will judge more harshly
The Queen who, knowing her people's ailment, feared
To give them health lest men unborn should blame her.

Howard. Your Grace, we have no choice. This woman
must die.

She hath a hundred times with devilish plots
Schemed for your murder, and a hundred times,
By God's grace only, failed. We can but fear
A chance-drawn arrow at last may hit the mark,
And then—what then? She has been justly tried,
And doomed to death. Let then the law proceed;
Yield to the nation's prayer and Philip of Spain
May ring this England round with all his navies,
But never set foot therein.

Eliz.

I do believe

That you would have me seek for good in ill.
O fie! my lords, this is rank jesuitry.
I do not fear my brother of Spain at all—
You, too, my Lord of Leicester, think as I?

[*All turn towards LEICESTER, who replies after
a moment's hesitation.*]

Leicr. I did, your Grace, but late; and oft upheld
That, as a monarch, Mary Queen of Scots
Had right to trial before her royal peers.
But now this danger threatening from without

ACT II SCENE I

Makes urgent that within. Lord Burleigh says—
I too perceive it—that in Mary's death
Alone lies safety. She has been arraigned,
And by ten thousand hearts she stands condemned
As menace to their liberty and creed;
Should she be spared we shall not meet our foes
The better for this treason at our backs.

[ELIZABETH *buries her face in her hands.*

Eliz. My lords, you have no mercy—

Howard.

But her crimes—

Eliz. Nay, not for Mary. Would that she were dead.
'Tis I have need of mercy, I, not Mary.
You bid me will the deed that did you love me
Had long since been accomplished.

Burl.

We, your Grace,

Love your good fame too well for that. The world
Will see in it but justice if the blow
Fall in deliberate daylight.

Eliz.

Then mark well,

I call the little honest left in you
To witness that you forced me to the deed—
We will no more to-day.

[*Excunt omnes, except the QUEEN, who moves
away, WALSINGHAM and LEICESTER.*

Walsm. [*In low, hurried tones.*] Our thanks. She'll sign
The warrant to-night, or never. 'Twill be here
By seven o'clock. We now return to London.
The Council meets at midnight, by which time
We shall know more. You will attend, my lord.

Leicr. Nay, nay, I've done my part, now you do yours.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Walsm. You must indeed be there—

[*The QUEEN turns, and WALSINGHAM hurries away. LEICESTER follows, and is about to address him, when the QUEEN lays her hand on his shoulder. Exit WALSINGHAM.*

Eliz.

A word, my lord.

[*She regards him fixedly.*

These men do my behest, and never more
Than when they seem to sway me. I would fain
Have had it that to this most bloody deed
’Twas they compelled me—they, not you, my lord.
I have heaped honours on you, shown you favour,
And though I knew you sought your ends in all,
I chose to think you spoke my better thoughts,
Pleading for that unhappy queen, whom Fate
Has treated so spitefully. But now—
Burleigh has bid and found your price at last.

Leicr. Your Grace appealed to me to speak the truth;
I could no other.

Eliz.

Ah, too rich a bait.

What was it, Rob? We do not speak the truth
For nothing.

Leicr. Ay, ’tis true, I had a price,
A high reward which now I may not win:
It was your Grace’s smile. If you have chosen
To look on me as other than I am,
Well knowing I was not that but something else,
The fault lies not with me. To my full power
I strove to do you service—

Eliz.

God’s truth; yes,

ACT II SCENE I

Most loyal service! Mark me well, my lord,
I sought for one to stand beside my throne,
Forgetful of himself, with fearless speech
To keep me to the difficult point of justice:
I find him not in you. [*She moves away a few steps.*]

How were you bought?

What price did Burleigh offer?

Leicr. [Angrily.] When have I
Joined hands with Burleigh. Mighty little love
Is lost 'twixt him and me—your Grace knows that.
I had rejoiced to laugh his fears to scorn:
To say the Queen of Scots might live and you
Be safe, but that I dare not.

Eliz. [Laughs bitterly.] Dare not; Ah!
The bargain had been voided.

[*LEICESTER makes an angry gesture.*]

Hark, my lord.

[*She walks up to him.*]

You asked permission once to leave our Court;
You have it now. Those words you just now spoke—
Of love—I will forget that ever I heard them.

[*She points to exit, towards which LEICESTER moves.*]

If I should sink so low at any time
As to require your help—I'll send for you.

[*Exit LEICESTER, right. When he has gone she rushes after him, but pauses irresolutely; then, with air of renewed determination, exit left.*]

ACT II.

SCENE II. *The QUEEN'S Private Apartments in the
Palace at Greenwich.*

The QUEEN seated; Jester and Attendants.

Eliz. Good Clodd, I am oppressed with counsellors:
If thou couldst make my Lord of Burleigh laugh,
I'd give thee twenty crowns.

Clodd. While I, your Grace,
For half that sum would leave my lord alone;
He hath no taste for wit.

Eliz. Or I would give
A year of life to see his lordship drunk.
I think that I could err with better heart
To know this reverend counsellor were human.

Clodd. And yet good Burleigh hath kind thoughts of
you:
He'd have your Grace to marry. I even now
Can hear him, with his eyes turned up to heaven,
Enumerate your Grace's many virtues;
And then bewail that Nature hath not made
An all-sufficient perfect princely man
To wear so choice a jewel. He suspects
Your Grace to be too high of soul for marrying,
Or else that secret love consumes you——

Eliz. [*Menacingly.*]

Clodd,

ACT II SCENE II

You do presume.

Clodd. —Wherefore, within my heart,
I hold communion with myself, as thus:
The kings of Europe wooed her each in turn,
But all sighed hopelessly; then, "Clodd," say I,
"Art thou the cause? There is no properer man
About the Court than thou."—Yet oft ere this
Have fools worn crowns upon their pates! Indeed,
But for the hope that Burleigh in alarm
Might bid me, with a pension, leave the Court,
I had not faced so long this royal danger.

Enter Attendant.

Attend. Your Grace's secretary, Mr. Davison,
On urgent matters seeks an instant audience.

Eliz. So soon. [*Aside.*] Command him hither.

[*She rises and walks across the stage.*

What! they think,

The iron being hot, to strike! . . . Good Clodd, thy tale
We'll hear some other time.

Clodd. Thus am I shelved,
I'll go and pine of love. [*Exit.*

Enter DAVISON carrying papers.

Eliz. We had not looked
To see you here so soon.

Davison. There are, your Grace,
Signs of such sickness in the body politic,

QUEEN ELIZABETH

That we as a prompt surgeon——

Eliz. Would let blood?

Could you not find some soft medicament,
Some subtle draught to serve the purpose, short
Of this fierce surgery?

Davison. Your Grace, a limb
That is diseased, 'twere vain to treat with physic.
I have brought——

Eliz. To me as chief physician,
Some short prescriptions for the realm's disorders—
Writs, warrants, what-nots? Well, then, place them here.
What must be must—but trouble me not again.

[*ELIZABETH seats herself at a table. DAVISON places the papers before her and hands her a pen. She signs the papers without reading them, flinging them one by one on to the ground. DAVISON gathers them up.*

Davison. [*Making to retire.*] Your Majesty's permission.

Eliz. [*After a silence.*] Davison!

Davison. [*Returning.*] Your Grace's humble servant!

Eliz. [*After silence.*] Davison!

[*She rises and addresses him across the table.*

A thing is done that I would fain undo,
But may not. [*Breaks the pen.*] Thus destruction shall
o'ertake

The enemies of England. . . . Yet 'tis sad
That I, a woman, thus should send to death
A queen, anointed like myself, for want
Of friends to do the thing not mine to do. . . .

ACT II SCENE II

Be thou discreet. Mark you, let all be done
With decent speed. The Scottish Queen's death warrant,
Hand it to them whose duty 'tis to see
The execution done.

[DAVISON *bows and retires. The QUEEN allows
him to reach the door, then calls him back.*

Stay, Davison!

[*Whispers.*] Is there no other way?—think, Davison!

Davison. Your Majesty?

Eliz.

Art dense, good Davison!

Can you not see how you might come to fortune?

The gaolers of the Queen of Scots—old Paulet

And Drury—I have, so do I esteem them,

Marked out for special honour. Will they not

For that great love I bear them—spare me this?

Davison. Would but your Grace——

Eliz.

Death often comes to kings

By no less natural means though secretly;

'Tis ordered so by heaven with eye to peace.

[*Whispers.*] Were it not best for all that Mary died—

Died, my good Davison! She often ails—

That's known—she might ail more! The headsman's axe

Will rive the hearts of thousands in this realm.

[*She takes hold of his sleeve.*] Go you to Paulet, Drury;
tell them this,

Hint my esteem—make offer——

Davison. [*Shakes his head.*] Nay, your Grace,

I pray——

Eliz. [*Angrily.*] God's blood! then wherefore did they
swear,

QUEEN ELIZABETH

You too, if need, to die in my defence?
Yet here you show such delicate nicety,
Discover so fine a conscience, you would act
As though, against your will, spurred on by me
Thirsting for blood. Go back, Lord Burleigh waits you,
With Walsingham, to weep my cruel decision.
But mark you, Davison, I'll have no haste,
To-morrow morn I may think better of it.

[*Exit* DAVISON.]

Cowards! cowards! will not a hand for love or pay
Stretch forth to help me? This fair realm lacks not
Its proper complement of scoundrels, cut-throats,
And choicest gallows'-fruit; yet in my need
The world dons broadcloth, thanks God for its con-
science,

And strokes its lardy cheeks, while I, the scapegoat,
Must bear the sin that saves their dastard skins—
For die she must, though for her death I stand
Before the stern tribunal of the future,
As one who slew the dove that sought with her
Protection from the hawk. . . . See how she sits
Within my kingdom's heart, a poisonous spider,
Spinning a web, far-flung, invisible,
Of treason round my subjects. Norfolk died,
Caught in her toils—he loved this woman more
Than he loved honour. Others, too, innumerable,
Young men and old, has she by strange enchantment,
Lured on to death—a dreadful clock-work she,
Working in silence to the fatal hour
Struck time and time again by the headsman's axe.

ACT II SCENE II

Philip of Spain, prepared for our invasion,
Waits but a sign from her. Through all the land,
Like maggots in a carcase, unseen foes
Denounce me in the credulous popular ear,
Inspired by her, as murderess and usurper.

[She paces across the stage.]

Yet, God forgive me! This is to practise lies
Upon my very soul. Has it not been
Torment to me—torment with fruit of hate—
That not my son shall rule when I am dead,
But hers. Ah, God, hers, hers! Can I declare,
And risk my soul upon it, that 'tis not
For this I yield; that envy stings me not
To give her up to death—she must not die.

*[She flings open the casement. Light from moon
pours in. Rest of chamber darkened.]*

Ah, there he is, about to mount his horse,
Bent on a deed the world would never let die. . . .
He tries the girths again. . . . The indifferent moon
Hangs like a lamp in the night to light his way
To consummate this murder—but kind heaven
For once allows me, having let loose the shaft,
To stay its flight.

[She draws back from window.]

I would not have the grooms
Marvel and whisper, multiply surmise:
'Twere best to wait—he needs must pass below
The casement here, and then I'll call him back . . .
O will he never come!

[Sound of horse-hoofs heard on the pitching.]

Nay, it must be;

QUEEN ELIZABETH

I know that it must be. Were I to spare,
My mercy were unmerciful to England.
For though I envy her—though in my heart
Be thoughts revengeful, hate and jealousy,
She is for that no less the general foe.

[DAVISON *passes below, and the clatter of horse-hoofs dies away in the distance. She returns to centre of stage, with signs of agitation.*

And now it is too late! There is no ill,
No accident that shall, by God's kind mercy,
Stay that fierce rider. Burleigh and his crew,
Had they alone made clamour for her life,
I had delayed. But Leicester joined with them;
His faults I know, I read him as a book;
He seeks his own ends—yet I think his love
Not all self-seeking, and for this I'll answer,
He would not weight my soul with needless sins. . . .
What! do I read my heart aright in this?
Have I delivered my sister queen to death
That rumour of it voiced upon the winds
May prove to Leicester, sore with my contempt,
That still I love him, love him. . . .

O kind heaven!

Do I let slip this great prerogative
Of mercy from my hand for love or hate,
For madness or for fear? Nay, here the queen
Must act and put the woman by, nor plead
That as a woman, stronger wills than hers
Have bent her to their purpose, for, through all,
I knew this thing could not but be at last.

ACT II SCENE II

What hast Thou placed upon my shoulders?

[Falls upon her knees.

God!

Who readest all men's hearts, whose breath can make
And unmake kings; I pray Thee judge between
This woman and myself, for I must needs
The while I hate her give her up to death,
To make secure the fate of this great people,
Whom Thou hast given to me in governance.
If I have sinned; if others, too, have sinned,
Let mine alone be chastisement—they move
Blindly to what they must, while as for me——

[She buries her face in her hands, and so, kneeling, the moonlight streaming in upon her, the curtain falls.

ACT II.

SCENE III. *Council Chamber.*

MASTER LANEHAM *alone.*

Laneham. A murrain on these troublous times, say I.
We, on whose shoulders press the cares of state,
Observed with envy by the general crowd
Who mark alone our splendour, are, indeed,
Deserving more of pity. I was bidden
To wait upon my lords at eight o'clock;
And now 'tis on the stroke of twelve. No man
But one who holds high office like to mine,
Would stomach such a treatment! Hark to this:
At nine the widow Barton had prepared
A dainty meal of generous cookery;
She hath no doubt suspected grave affairs
Caused my delay, while I, alas! have sat
Consumed by hunger, which, upon the hour
Of nine, seized on my vitals as in thought
The widow pressed upon me her good fare,
And prayed me not to let the pasty pass;
And then, with almost tearful eyes, as one
Anxious for proof that nought assailed my health,
Refused denial in matter of truffles, ham—
Sweet, juicy ham, ah! murrain take it all.

[*Sound without. He springs to his feet.*]

ACT II SCENE III

Enter LEICESTER.

My lord.

Leicr. Good Laneham, I am then the first.
The rest are somewhat late, for midnight struck
Some minutes since.

Laneham. [*Aside.*] And so my lords were summoned
For midnight, I for eight—a loss of time
And waste incurable of a right good supper.
I have a mind to go and hang myself. [*Exit.*

Leicr. Whether she did resolve on Mary's death,
And sign the warrant, now is nought to me.
My part is played in these mad politics;
And faith! it was a fool's part ever to seek
To wed this queen who hangs an empty heart
For men to snatch at on a weather-cock.
But now that too is ended and I'm free
To marry at last for love and not ambition. . . .
And yet the Queen's suspicions pierced the quick:
What made her ask the price that Burleigh paid
For my support? Did I still seek high ends,
How well might I, by egging Burleigh on
To haste Queen Mary's death, plunge him deep in
The pit he digged for me; for, sure, her Grace
Though she have signed the warrant, will change her
mind,
Then woe to all who took her at her word.

*Enter LORDS BURLEIGH, HUNSDON, COBHAM, and DERBY,
SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM, SIR CHRISTOPHER HAT-
TON, and SECRETARY DAVISON. They converse in*

QUEEN ELIZABETH

dumb show, and group themselves round the table, at head of which BURLEIGH takes up his position.

Burl. So; now see that the guard be placed without.

[*HATTON goes to the door. Guard marching down corridor and command "Halt!" heard.*

HATTON closes door.

[*To LEICESTER.*] My lord, we thank you for your seasonable words

In her Majesty's ear, and for your presence now.

[*To DAVISON.*] Lay it upon the table.

[*DAVISON places QUEEN OF SCOTS' Death-Warrant upon the table.*

There, my lords,

Lies to our hand the keen sword that shall cut
The knot of all our troubles—the warrant signed
And sealed, whereby the Scottish Queen must die,
Not only for her crimes, but that the lives
Of thousands may be saved. Who will maintain
The price too great for her to pay who spread
The fatal lime abroad that snared the best
And noblest of this realm in treason? Yet
If one there be amongst us who would plead
For pause in execution, or contend
That justice errs, in God's name let him speak,
And he and we still in the same mind fixed,
Then may he leave us. But before all fear,
Since ours is not a task for fearful men;
Before all private interest, ere he speak,
Let him reflect that England waits our verdict

ACT II SCENE III

With bated breath. I will not now recall—
The time for that is passed—how came about
The Scottish Queen's imprisonment——

Howard.

My lord,

I am a sailor, and upon the sea
We speak of ugly things by ugly names.
I say it was a deed most infamous
To clap the Scottish Queen between four walls;
To hold her ignominiously a prisoner,
Who, kneeling at our gates, with hands upraised,
Cried "Save me from my foes."

Burl.

I stand not now

To plead for any cause; to make excuse
For any act. What has been done is done,
And if we do or do not do the deed
That safety calls for, this will still remain,
That whether for good or ill we held her fast
As foe of England. For this same the future
Will weigh the arguments and judge us. We
Have but to-day to think of—present dangers.

Howard. Think not, my lord, but that I'll stand by
you.

I do but owe a duty to myself,
That had no hand in that same doubtful act,
To make a protest for the past that's done with.

Burl. My thanks, Lord Howard, for this most welcome
speech.

You hold the Roman faith—for you to stand
Beside us Protestants proves you inspired
With that high patriotism which never fails

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Our country in its need. Now, we who watch
About her Grace; who feel the impetuous blood
Leap through the nation's pulses, know the danger
That hangs above us—that we play a game
Against the Pope, the Kings of France and Spain;
And that upon the issue hangs our freedom.
The nation, moved to sullen anger, chafes
At peace which is not peace. The energy
Which is its natural promise, chokes in its channels,
And ceaseless whisper of plot and counter-plot
Acts upon trade—the source of national health—
As frost on trees in bloom. I say, my lords,
There is a force cooped up in this small isle
That must find vent—a spirit held in check
By all that Mary's death will sweep away,
Which hears of continents beyond the seas,
And isles of spice beneath the tropic skies,
But as a youth, born nobly, heeds the scrivener
Enumerate his mighty heritage.
This is the point that we, at length, have reached;
This is the formal challenge of our fitness,
And failing now be sure we fail for ever.

Leicr. My lord, we all are with you, yet 'twere well
To weigh the consequence. Each drop we shed
Of Mary's blood will raise a thousand foes;
Her death will force the Kings of France and Spain,
In whose disunion England's safety lies,
To joint revenge.

Howard. These kings have yet to tame
That greater England lapping round their shores,

ACT II SCENE III

And bickering at their very gates—the sea.

I pray you have no fear.

Leicr. [*Laughs.*] Brave words, my lord,
I love this braggadocio of the sea.
The Kings of France and Spain have many ships,
While we——

Howard. Though few, enough to sink them all.

Burl. My Lord of Leicester, we have given it thought.
Ours is a desperate cure to fling our gage
In the face of a world in arms, but we must dare it.
Our country is divided—you know well
How fares a house divided against itself—
I know how true the heart of England beats,
And that but needs the menace of her foes
To clench the ranks of doubtful loyalty;
How those who pity Mary, hate Elizabeth,
Forgetting all, will cry “Hands off our England!”
Believe me, then, that warrant, though it bears
Death to the Queen of Scots, gives England life;
And since Elizabeth, too prone to pity,
May change her mind (even now I do not doubt
A courier speeds to bid us hold our hands),
’Tis time for deeds not words.

Howard. I would, my lord,
You’d put the deeds first: words can wait, in sooth.

Burl. We stand, then, all together.—Pray you, now,
Each one to place his hand upon this warrant,
In proof of unity.

[*Each one in turn, except LEICESTER, places his
hand upon the warrant.*]

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Leicr. I will not do it.
Though we be servants of the state, and peace
Demands this thing, as servants of the Queen
It little befits our trust to run in the dark;
Deny the deed its proper dignity,
As though the Queen knew not where justice lay.
Wait but a day, and then I'll join with you;
From such a coil we might, once set upon it,
Yet find some other way.

[*Confusion.* DAVISON *whispers to* WALSING-
HAM.

Walsm. These are her words—
Her Grace's very words. We did not look
For you to openly help, then in her ear
To whisper another tale.

Leicr. My presence here
Gives lie to that.

Howard. [*Scornfully.*] To us who know my lord,
'Twere rather confirmation. This shall be
Accounted to your credit with the Queen,
And doubtless haste the happy day when men
Shall shout with joy: "God save King Robert Dudley!"

Leicr. Vex not your souls, my lords, with jealous fears,
I do not need your help to make me king.
But this I say once more: in all that tends
To the nation's welfare, so you do but act
With eye to the Queen's honour I'll be with you,
And at this hour to-morrow night, if need,
Will place my hand with yours upon that warrant.

[*Exit* LEICESTER.

ACT II SCENE III

Howard. Does he defy us thus because the Queen
Has given him that we feigned to help him to?

[*Confused talking.* BURLEIGH, *still standing at
the head of the table, raises his hand.*

Burl. We wander from our business, which is not
To do with Leicester and his vain ambitions.
Yet be assured, if any know the Queen,
'Tis I, and I can tell you that this Leicester,
With help from us or not, will never wed her.
I take it, then, that we are still resolved
To let the warrant go.

[*A murmur of assent.* BURLEIGH *rolls up the
warrant.*

Burl. [*To* DAVISON.] The messenger.

[*DAVISON goes to the door and returns with
Messenger, booted and spurred.*

[*To Messenger.*] The trusty rider whom we named to you,
Is on his way to warn Sir Amyas Paulet?

Messenger. He left an hour ago, my lord.

Burl.

'Tis well.

Take this despatch, and ride to Fotheringay;
Hand it to him who holds the Queen of Scots,
Then wait in readiness to bring us word
When all shall be accomplished. [*Exit Messenger.*]

Now, my lords.

In name of each of us I call on God,
Who reads the inmost thoughts of all our hearts,
To judge us if we do this thing for aught
Save for the safety of this English realm,
And to maintain our ancient liberties.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

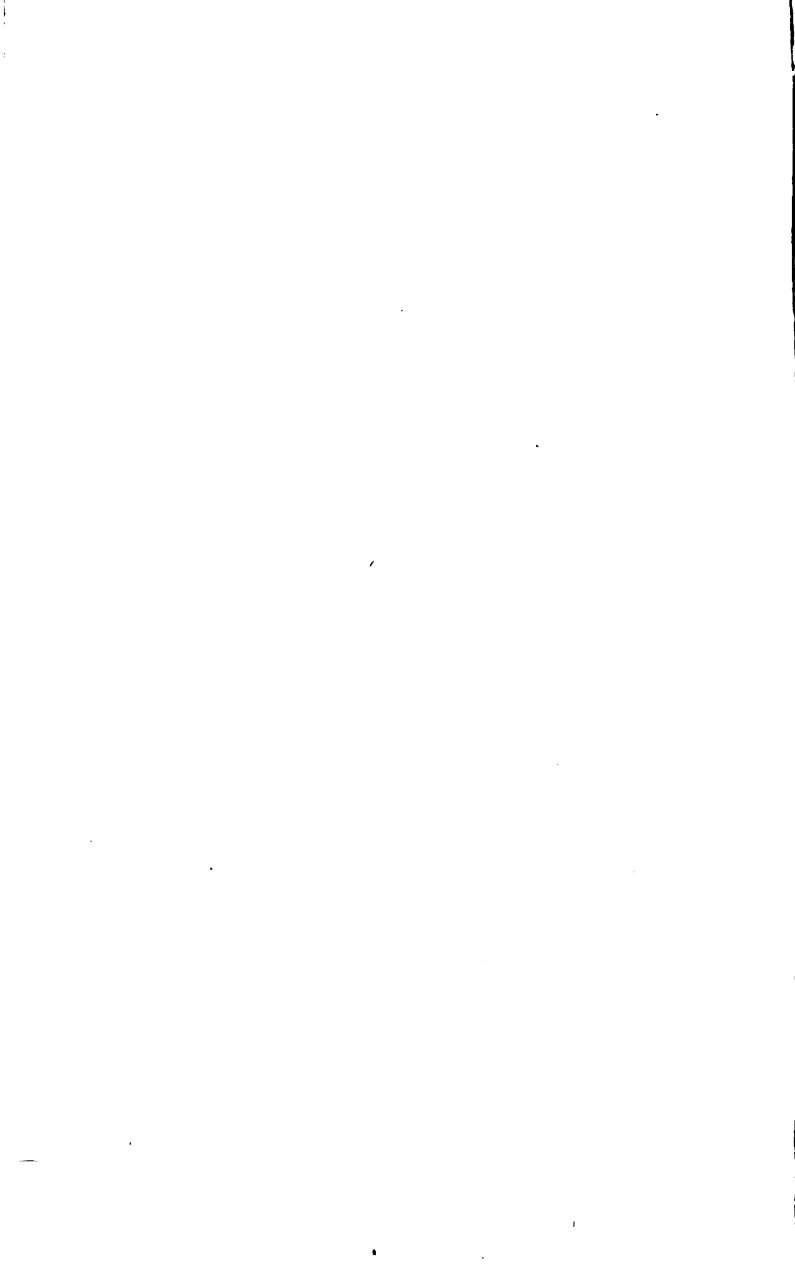
Too, ere we part, I would you joined with me
In prayer, not only that this dreadful deed
May gain the longed-for end to which we strive;
But for her soul, who, through misguided years,
Has been the cause of hate and strife, and who
Now reaps at last the harvest of her deeds;
For her who, all unwitting, raised the storm
Whence, after many days and dreadful stress,
A nation shall come forth made strong and pure;
Whose sons shall hold the corners of the earth,
And curb the roaring seas with sovereignty.

[They bend their heads.]

CURTAIN.

INTERVAL BETWEEN SCENES III. AND IV.

Here a picture shall be thrown on a screen, or a tableau shown, representing the Execution of Mary Queen of Scots, in the great hall of Fotheringay Castle.



ACT II.

SCENE IV. *Garden of the Palace of Greenwich, with distant view of the River.*

CLODD, *seated, smoking a long pipe.*

Clodd. 'Tis well to be a fool if this strange weed
Be held by wise men as a cure for folly. [Puffs.
But since her Majesty is somewhat blind
To the undoubted virtues of tobacco,
Deeming, with Burleigh, fools incurable,
We cultivate a kind of mystery,
Think philosophic thoughts in shady groves,
And presently emerge—a trifle pale. [He puffs again.

Enter LADY DOUGLAS SHEFFIELD *weeping. He holds the pipe behind him.*

Here is another sufferer, lack-a-day—
Would she but try tobacco.

[*She sees CLODD, and dashes away her tears.*

Lady Sheffield. How now, Clodd!

Clodd. Your ladyship, if you have found me out,
I do not cry you mercy, for I too
Have seen a thing which I may tell on you.

Lady Sheffield. Pray what?

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Clodd. [*Pointing with his pipe-stem.*] You walk with
treason in your heart, . . . [*She starts.*
And, further, dim the beauty of your eyes
With most unnecessary tears.

Lady Sheffield. I weep?

Clodd. Weep? Yes, you weep the tears of one much
wronged.

Lady Sheffield. I have no wrongs, good Clodd, yet, if
you will,
I'll say my wrongs begin with mine own self,
And end there.

Clodd. Dearest lady, this is truth:
That Clodd's too great a fool to wipe from mind
All memory of past kindness. As you know,
Your father came between me and my misery,
And sheltered my rough boyhood. That is why
I do accuse you now of tears and treason.

Lady Sheffield. Then I'll plead guilty, Clodd. I hate
this place;
I would I were away. . . . You prosper here!

Clodd. The Court's a magnet for all fools, dear lady.
But now a word in your ear. I know of some
Who hold not with her Grace's prudery
That makes of marrying treason. If to you
Be aught more precious than the Queen's tart smiles,
Do this [*he beckons*], and this [*he whistles*].

Lady Sheffield. [*Startled.*] Why do you speak of marry-
ing?

Clodd. I speak but in the abstract: 'tis a subject
On which I talk most learnedly; now take

ACT II SCENE IV

We'll say, as one by all men known and watched,
The Earl of Leicester—

Lady Sheffield. [*Interrupting.*] Why make choice of him?

Clodd. Who better could be named as case in point?
He is a moth that flutters round a flame
That will not burn him. Do you think the Queen
Will ever make him king?

Lady Sheffield. I do not know;
Good Clodd, why should I know?

Clodd. Ah! That's a riddle.
I never guessed a riddle in my life,
Though I ask many. Bend your ear o me.
Were I Lord Leicester, I would ride away
And seek elsewhere a better than I left—
Or take the best behind me on a pillion.
But hush; here comes another like ourselves,
Enamoured of himself and solitude.

Lady Sheffield. 'Tis nought to me who comes, so that
he goes.
You must, indeed, speak plainer.

Clodd. [*Peeping round corner.*] By my faith,
The Earl himself.

Lady Sheffield. [*Excitedly.*] Which way? I must be gone.
Let him not see me, Clodd.

[*Exit hurriedly.* CLODD laughs and lays pipe on
grass behind the seat.

Clodd. What wondrous skill
Have women in the art of self-concealment!
But heaven forgive the lie—the end was good.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Enter SIR JOHN HARRINGTON.

Har. Good Clodd, when comes her Grace to take the air?

Clodd. Good Harrington, in faith, I do not know.

Har. [*Laughingly.*] What 's that behind the seat?

[*CLODD picks up the pipe and gazes at it with surprise.*]

Clodd.

I am amazed

That any man within the royal precincts
Should so debase himself.

Har.

I tried it once,

It—dealt with me unkindly. But should you
Yearn for a taste of that same sickly weed,
I'll send you some that old John Hawkins gave me . . .
Say, do you think her Grace is in the mood
For—

Clodd. Eh, Sir John?

Har.

There is a small estate—

O nothing, nothing, merely a manor or two—
Late forfeited by treason. I'm in fear
Her Grace may overlook her cousin, Clodd,
Her humble cousin plagued by poverty,
And though entirely honest and deserving,
Too long denied desert. See, I have donned
The new frieze jerkin which her Grace was pleased
To say so well became me—

ACT II SCENE IV

Enter SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON. *He is about to pass on, but seeing HARRINGTON, he stops.*

Hatton. [*Secretly.*] If, Sir John,
You have some favour you would ask the Queen—
The sun shines not.

Har. Thanks, Hatton. I've a suit
So modest that it will not lift its head
Save in bright sunshine. [*Exit* HATTON.]

Enter QUEEN *at top centre, with Ladies and Attendants.*
Simultaneously, BURLEIGH, HOWARD, WALSINGHAM,
HUNSDON and others, right. QUEEN talks in dumb
show with Ladies in Waiting.

Walsm. [*To BURLEIGH.*] Nought from Fotheringay,
And yet the dead air shapes itself to whispers,
As though great news outran the messenger.
I saw upon my way two watermen
Pause in mid-stream and whisper and nod across
An interval of muddy Thames: then speed
Apart again. But have a care, her Grace
Watches us covertly.

Burl. I would I knew
How much she knows or guesses. Since she signed,
Now four days since, the warrant for Mary's death,
She acts as though she had forgotten it;
And yet 'tis plain that she suspects us; waits
For news that's long a-coming—Ah! at last!

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Messenger *enters and hands letter to BURLEIGH, who passes it on to WALSINGHAM.*

Retire and read this out of sight of the Queen.

[*Exit WALSINGHAM. Confused ringing of church bells in distance.*]

Eliz. What mean those bells, my lord? Our citizens
Make sudden choice of days for festival.

Burl. I do not know, your Grace. Maybe some news
Of victory, or of Spanish galleons captured—

[*She cracks her fingers contemptuously and turns her back on him.*]

Re-enter WALSINGHAM.

Walsm. [*In low voice to BURLEIGH.*] The thing is done,
my lord, the Queen of Scots
Will trouble us no more.

Burl. God help us, then!

[*ELIZABETH turns.*]

Eliz. Have you, good friends, resolved why ring those
bells?

Ah, Walsingham! you have returned with news.
Your face betrays you, man. Do our good citizens
Make their high steeples clash for galleons captured?

Burl. [*To WALSINGHAM.*] Best tell her, Walsingham.

Walsm. [*To BURLEIGH.*] Nay, you, my lord.

Howard. [*Approaching the QUEEN.*] Your Majesty,
we wrong you to forget
That we've to do with Henry's royal daughter,

ACT II SCENE IV

And not with one by whom the truth is feared.

Your Grace——

Eliz. Words, words! God's blood! We deemed the sea
A school for deeds and not for words, Lord Admiral.

Howard. I'd tell it without words if but I could.
Those joy-bells ring because the Queen of Scots,
The nightmare of the nation, is no more;
She having paid the penalty of her crimes
Last night at Fotheringay.

Eliz. What do you say?
What has befallen our cousin Mary? Dead!
News had not reached us of her illness—dead!
Dead, did you say?

Burl. Your Highness, put to death
Under the warrant signed by your own hand,
With due observance of all ceremony,
As you would have it. But if any blame
Attend obedience to your will, we all——

Eliz. You all! Yea, all were banded in intent
To shame your Queen.

Burl. Your Grace, the law condemned——

Eliz. We hold you and the council answerable,
If this be true. Where is that Davison?
We bade him on the peril of his life
Await our further orders.

Burl. It was done,
As needs it had been done, to win the realm
To peace.

Eliz. Peace! War, I say. We yet had means
To stir up such fierce mischief in the Netherlands

QUEEN ELIZABETH

That Philip of Spain had found his hands too full
To dream of our invasion. Now, through this,
So have you slapped him in the face, he must
For very honour come.

Howard.

Come, let him then!

He had not come the less had you spared Mary.
We'll face him now, your Grace, without the fear
Of treason at our backs.

Eliz.

You all were cowards:

Did you so fear a woman, you must needs
Creep up, close-sheltered by my petticoats,
And stab from ambush. How shall I for shame
Hold parley with my brother kings; how meet
My subjects, so disgraced——

[Renewed and increased ringing of bells.]

Howard.

There, your Highness,

Your people mourn with joy-bells that disgrace
Which makes them free——

Eliz.

God's blood, man, hold your peace!
Will men to-morrow say that clamorous steeples
Made Mary's death less murder?

[She paces across the stage, showing signs of distress.]

Enter SIR FRANCIS DRAKE and others.

Or that I

Was but the helpless instrument of men
Who did to death this woman? When I looked
For forethought, counsel, help, you were divided;

ACT II SCENE IV

But in this crime what unanimity!

Leicester lies down with Burleigh. Say, my lord,

[To BURLEIGH.

By what fair promises did Burleigh prove

He would not eat my lamb, the Earl of Leicester?

[*Slight commotion amongst the Council.* BUR-

LEIGH *pushes DRAKE forward.*

Good Francis Drake, you here? Have you changed
trades

From fighting men to slaying helpless women?

Drake. I do not change my trade. I fight such men
As are your Grace's foes—and faith, there's plenty.

Burl. Sir Francis brings such news that all are foes
To England now, who heal not up division,
And banish every thought of private furtherance.
The hour is on us when the bravest heart,
Fearless itself, will quake for those it loves.
So much he gleaned from Spanish fishermen
Made prisoners in the Channel—more he'd gain,
Your Highness giving leave. He has a fleet
Riding in Plymouth Sound, wherewith he would
Make reconnaissance of the Spanish coast,
Peep into harbours, mark their industry,
Scent out the danger lest it fall upon us,
And catch us lulled in false security.

Eliz. I know Sir Francis as an honest man——
A virtue in my servants strangely rare.
My lords, you have done ill; we must prepare
To meet its consequence. Give him commission
Impress upon him that he show respect

QUEEN ELIZABETH

In all that doth concern the King of Spain.
I would he sailed at once. He gone, my lords,
I'll settle accounts with you.

[She moves away, then returns.]

Good Francis Drake,

If it should happen that by peaceful means
You could avert our brother of Spain's just wrath,
Who, mark you, hath not yet made war on us;
And who, indeed, hath now a grievous wrong
Suffered at the hands of these most barbarous men,
Whose punishment we take upon ourself
To his full satisfaction; or that, say,
You hap on means to his embarrassment
(Although we give you no authority),
In your discretion, pray you be not slothful.

*[DRAKE bows and is about to reply, when WAL-
SINGHAM stays him. Exit QUEEN, followed
by her Ladies and Attendants.]*

Burl. You must be gone, Sir Francis, lest she change.
Ride down the sleeping shires as though all Hell
Were hot upon your heels. Arrived at Plymouth,
Can you set sail at once?

Drake. 'Tis but three days
Since we dropped anchor in the Sound; the ships
Are foul, our stores exhausted.

Burl. Sure twelve hours—

Drake. Twelve hours, my lord? Twelve minutes were
enough.

Burl. Then get you gone. 'Tis ten to one the Queen
Will countermand it. England looks to you

ACT II SCENE IV

To put a spoke in Philip's chariot-wheel,
So when her courier comes, you must have sailed.

[*Exeunt omnes, except CLODD.*]

Clodd. [*Mimicking the QUEEN.*] We would make clear
our meaning, good Sir Francis.

You have our leave to err most damnably.
Do nothing for the reason that you do it;
And having done it, then may God forgive you.
Should it be aught that irks the King of Spain,
He shall be told thou art a desperate villain,
Safe to be hanged some day. See that thou seize
No ship with treasure laden, save for fear
She shall be pounced on by a worse than thou.

[*He picks up his pipe.*]

Enter LEICESTER.

My lord, you managed with so great discretion
To be too late to join the Council here,
I think you have forgot our partnership.
Shall I go tell the Queen that you have come
To take your rating?

Leicr. Clodd, I yield myself
As prisoner to your wit. Take this as ransom.

[*Gives him money.*]

The Queen must not be told that I am here.

Clodd. She is all eyes, my lord, you'd best be off.

Leicr. I have some business toward. Till that is done
I needs must risk it.

Clodd. Strange, but not long since

QUEEN ELIZABETH

The Lady Sheffield passed here seeking you.

At least——

Leicr. The Lady Sheffield!

Clodd. So I thought;

If you'll but saunter down yon shady path,

I'll tell her where to find you.

Leicr. [*After pause, during which he regards CLODD closely.* Thanks, good friend.

[*Exit LEICESTER. CLODD runs to top of stage, then returning he calls after LEICESTER.*

Do you recall the dream I dreamed, my lord,

About the luscious grass and mouldy hay,

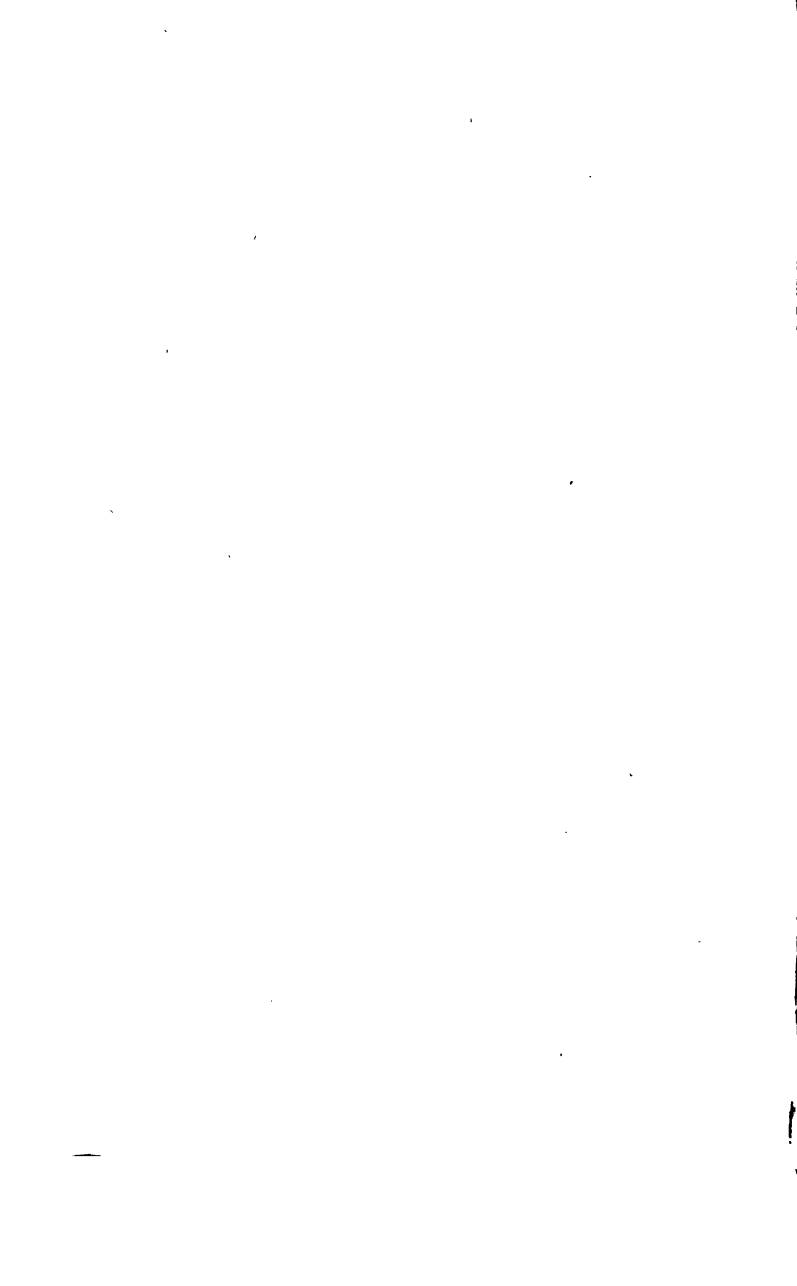
And that sad ass that knew not his own mind?

'Tis a fine chance for you to ruminate

Upon the choice he should have made, my lord.

[*Exit. Laughing.*

ACT III



ACT III.

A year later.

SCENE I. *Kenilworth. An apartment in the Castle.*

LEICESTER *seated*. COUNTESS OF LEICESTER (*late Lady DOUGLAS SHEFFIELD*) *on a stool at his feet.*

Leicester.

YOU say this Clodd, then, was a friend of yours?
Countess. A most true friend.

Leicr. I seldom heeded him;
He seemed more knave than fool; but once he dared
To make a butt of me, and when in wrath
I bade him cease, the rascal changed his tune,
And begged me tell him what implied a dream
Which he had woke too soon to know the end of.
’Twas all about an ass and mouldy hay——

Countess. An ass and mouldy hay?

Leicr. So he averred;
I have forgot the rest.

Countess. But you, dear Rob,
Could you for this strange dream of mouldy hay,
And—of an ass, you said,—find any meaning?

Leicr. [*Hastily.*] I gave it scarce a thought—it was not
worth it.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

But now we'll talk of other things.

Countess.

Then tell

Once more how you, by chariots unpursued,
Fled from Elizabeth and the house of bondage.
It was a bondage, was't not?

Leicr.

Ay, from which

Escaped, I found the Land of Promise, yet
That fierce she-Pharaoh whom I fled, even now
Has power o'er both of us.

Countess.

What power, my lord?

Leicr. A power too great to close our eyes to it.

Though we for six sweet months, with happy wiles,
Have hid from her the secret of our marriage,
Do you not know of those unhappy whom
She would have single, when they dared to marry,
She shut them fast in separate dungeons; so
Fed each with poisonous tales of dark unfaith,
Of sickness, danger, that with anxious fret,
They pined away and died? If she should learn
The ailment was but sickness of the heart
That called you from the Court; and how 'twas cured,
What were the consequence?

Countess.

Fear not for that.

When she at last shall hear, as hear she must,
What we have done, you'll take me to the Court,
Confront her fearlessly, and once for all
Confess me as your wife.

Leicr.

We should gain nought—

Nay, rather, might lose all; for all I have
The Queen bestowed and can at will resume;

ACT III SCENE I

And all I am, I am but through her favour;
To most disastrously undo us both—
That is her power, dear love; for all I know
Our secret's out, and she but bides her time
To take revenge; why, now I think of it
She oft would twit me of a secret love——

Countess. You never told me this.

Leicr. Why should I, sweet?

Countess. Then wherefore now, save you have cause
for it?

Leicr. A cause for it?

Countess. Love gives no thought to danger,
Save Love be weary.

Leicr. Truth! I did but try you.
The food, you know, of Love is dear assurance
Repeatedly assured. Though what I have
I know mine own, yet I would hear again
The exquisite perusal of my title.
Is there a sweeter music Love can hear?

Countess. Ah, Rob! I do not feel the passionate pulse
Of Love in these conceits. But I, maybe,
Have caught a somewhat downright from the country—
The broad green fields, the dusky, rutted lanes
Where primroses lie smouldering in the gloom;
The fields ploughed through and through for one grave
use,

The words and steps of men who till the land—
The kindly autocrats of this fat earth—
All these are things which be what they appear
And these regarding day by day, my Rob,

QUEEN ELIZABETH

When you in London play your part of statesman,
With memories in my mind of courtly phrases,
And high-flown adjurations, I, at times,
Long for I know not what.

Leicr.

What more asks Love?

Is 't not enough that I attend the Court
No oftener than I may; that this abstention
To all the world is proof of my disgrace?

Countess. Ah, Rob, I fear you dwell too much upon
The in-essential part—her Grace's favour.

Leicr. To disprove that I will forswear the Court,
Abjure affairs, live the free country life,
And never leave you.

Countess.

Nay, I would not that:

'Tis said that Spain prepares for our invasion,
Soon, then, my lord, there will be need of you.
You would not stop your ears to England's call?

Leicr. Then fear you not, I will forget my wrongs;
Forget myself; strive to forget my love,
In such effectual service that the Queen
Needs must condone our fault.

Countess.

Think not of me—

But now the hour grows late. This country air
Wooes all to slumber as at sunset hour
It shuts the daisies' eyes and bids them sleep;
The very moon looks with astonishment
On these late-lighted casements. Come you soon.

[*Exit* COUNTESS.]

Leicr. I spoke no lies, yet conscience calls me "liar."
Does that same inward mentor know the part

ACT III SCENE I

That I have thought to act, beyond my power?
The path is straight that honour bids me follow,
Yet having come so far my footsteps falter.
I hold in hand the thing which, unpossessed,
I yearned in secret for—love and the promise
Of sons and daughters; yet, with these ensured,
I sicken once more with visions of a crown
Held out as prize.

Enter Attendant.

Attendant. A messenger, my lord,
With furious riding splashed, craves instant audience.
Leicr. Bid him hither. [*Exit Attendant.*
Wherefore, then, this haste?
What need can Burleigh have of me?

Enter Messenger.

Messenger. My lord,
I was enjoined by her——
Leicr. Her?
Messenger. —Majesty
To see these reached your hand.
Leicr. This be your thanks.
[*Gives him money. Exit Messenger.*
The thing is out. This is the Queen's own hand;
I was a fool to think to hide from her
My marriage; ay, thrice fool to marry at all.
[*Breaking open letter.*

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Unsleeping eyes spy for her; lying tongues
Divulge what eyes have seen not; Walsingham
On every English hearth has his informer,
And all the winds blow treasons to his ears. [*Reads letter.*
“When these shall reach you I shall need you more
“Than now I do. I fear me I have been
“At best an ingrate to my truest friend;
“Come, with all speed. For this occasion, Rob,
“I sign me as your queen—Elizabeth.”
My lord of Leicester, what means this—a trap?
Nay, nay, I’ll not mistrust her. When she lies,
And that she can right royally, so her words,
Inflated, mince and move with pomp, her sense
Is half obscured. This is writ short and sharp,
And thus alone she speaks and writes the truth.
But what’s that truth she hints at? More or less
Than on the surface lies? And more or less,
What can it mean but that I think it means?
Ah, God! I knew a man who wore out life
In seeking some poor meed of fame. He died,
Unblest, uncursed, by that for which he sought,
As did I also. Now upon my grave
She lays what I had thought above my reach—
Above my reach? Is it after all too late?
’Twas rumoured once that coveting this same crown,
I swept aside that gentle obstacle,
Poor Amy Robsart. Yet though there they lied,
It gave a kind of sanction to the price. . . .
Nay, nay. The risk’s too great. Her Grace ere this
Has gone as far—— [*Looks at letter again.*

ACT III SCENE I

Yet there's a plainness here
That's strange to her: "For this occasion, Rob,
"I sign me as your queen." What other way
Were possible—save that? . . . but time speeds fast.
I must set forth at once.

[He flings the letter on the table and hurries out]

Re-enter COUNTESS in a white robe.

Countess. My lord, they say—
Not here? Ah, well, it matters not. But yet—
[She rings a bell.]

Enter Attendant.

Where is my lord?

Attendant. There came, your ladyship,
Not many minutes since, a messenger
To summon my lord to London. All is haste.
His escort has been summoned. *[Exit.]*

Countess. Then 'twas this
My lord had fear of, and my thoughtless tongue
Made light of. Is this end of all our joy—?
Shall now betwixt us come the angry Queen
To tear our lives asunder? What is this?
The Queen's own hand! *[Takes up letter and reads it.]*

So in her need she finds
Leicester's true worth: nay, it would seem by this
That we have sinned against her in our hearts;
That it had better been to play the part
Of frankness from the first. But now's his chance

QUEEN ELIZABETH

To bring our sorry comedy to end
And win the Queen's forgiveness.—Ah!

*Enter LEICESTER, equipped for riding. She hides the letter
behind her back.*

Leicr.

You here!

You know the news then?

Countess.

Yes, you have been summoned
To London instantly. I have no fear;
Nay, I rejoice that in this hour of need
The—nation turns to you.

Leicr.

Ay, there is need
For every brave man now. Burleigh would not
Save in most imminent danger——

Countess.

Burleigh, Rob?

Leicr. Ay, Burleigh. All the Council have been summoned;

He gives no reason save what "Haste!" conveys,
And that, I do not doubt, is that the thing
We long have feared at last has come upon us.
When I left London, even then the citizens
Were listening chalk-faced to a thousand rumours:
Now, 'twas that Howard was skeltering up the Channel,
The Spaniards at his heels; then that the Dons
Had landed and were marching thousands deep
Upon the capital; worse still, spoke loud
A too just discontent which blames the Queen
For wilful blindness to the nation's peril—
For that mean policy which leaves our gates

ACT III SCENE I

Unbarred to the invader; to us, now,
No doubt will fall to mend this, and prepare
The nation for defence. So, farewell, sweet!
It will not be for long. You weep? I swear
Do you but bid me stay——

Countess. [*Coldly.*] I do not weep.
I would not have you stay. Farewell, my lord.

[*Exit LEICESTER.*]

O, dare I think? Nay, I might do him wrong.
But wherefore did he tell a lie? Maybe
'Twas kindly meant. He would not leave me prey
To unknown fears. . . . Perchance the wrong was mine,
For sure this letter was not writ for me!
Yet truth is always truth, and lies are lies.

[*Looking out of window.*]

Ah, there he goes. How fast he rides away,
With never a backward glance. Dear husband—Rob!
I know not what you ride to, but my heart
Is heavy, heavy—I will pray for you!

ACT III.

SCENE II. *A State Apartment in the Palace at Greenwich.*

MASTER LANEHAM *and two Workmen.*

Laneham. Hi, fellow! Sirrah!

First Workman. Eh?

Laneham. [*Angrily.*] Why, how long hast thou been about the Court?

Workman. Nigh thirty year.

Laneham. Full time thou hadst learnt Court manners. Dost thou not know that when thou art spoken to by the quality, thou shouldst tug thy forelock, and say: "My lord."

Workman. Eh?

Laneham. [*Impatiently.*] Get on with thy work.

[*Workman moves away slowly.*]

But stay, art thou by any chance married?

Workman. [*With appearance of alarm.*] Who?

Laneham. You, man, you; are you married?

Workman. Aye.

Laneham. Now, if thou wast a widower, and there was, for example, a widow, well endowed with earthly gear, and of comely presence, ready to be thy wife for the asking, wouldst thou not marry her?

ACT III SCENE II

Workman. [*With surprise.*] A widow?

Laneham. Aye. Wouldst thou not marry her?

Workman. [*With knowing shake of head.*] Nah.

Laneham. But if she doted on thee, and thou wast the apple of her eye, and the dream of her heart, and granting, too, that thou wast thyself of noble presence [*Plum-ing himself.*] and stately carriage, wouldst thou, indeed, not marry her then?

Workman. Who? The widow?

Laneham. Aye.

Workman. [*With emphasis.*] Nah.

Laneham. Why, thou fool——

Enter LORDS BURLEIGH, HUNSDON, SIR FRANCIS WALSHINGHAM, SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON, LORD KEEPER BACON, and others. *Exit* LANEHAM and Workmen.

Hunsdon. The nation calls for guidance, vigorous counsels;

Her Grace still clings to hopes of peace.

Hatton.

That peace

We may expect, then, which a foe bestows

At point of sword.

Burl.

We have through many a year

Kept the slow wheels of state upon the track

In spite of all her Grace's changing moods.

But now the time has come when she must see

As we see—do as we would have her do,

Or Philip of Spain will find us unprepared,

Our guns struck dumb, and half our ships unmanned.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Hunsdon. We must thank God that, so far, ceaseless storm
Has filled the Channel with such tempestuous hell,
That not a Spanish ship dare venture there.

Bacon. [*Bitterly.*] And, truth! if storms will do her
work for naught
Why need she waste her treasure?

Enter LEICESTER, armed.

Leicr. Pray you, lords.

Walsm. [*Aside.*] What, Leicester! Leicester here!
Why, what means this?

Leicr. I have been summoned by her Grace to audience,
And she, by me advised, has now resolved
On instant measures for the country's safety.
To Hawkins, Howard, has gone at last commission
To take all needful stores on board, and do
What in their wide commission they devise
Best to repel the foe. Her Grace herself
This afternoon reviews the troops at Tilbury.

Burl. Such news, my lord, is welcome to our ears,
Although we had not looked to you to bring it.
Her Grace has been informed that we await her?

Leicr. She will be here anon, though needing rest.
But, ere she comes, your pardon if I snatch
Occasion to discuss a certain matter.
You will remember that a year ago,
To gain my interest with the Queen to sign

ACT III SCENE II

The warrant for Mary's death, you made me offer
Of help and countenance should I seek to win
Her Grace's hand—the terms were yours, not mine.
My part therein was honourably performed,
And now I give you notice that ere long
I may require that you shall deal by me
As honourably as I by you.

Burl. Your part
Was honourably performed and we had done
No less by you, but that occasion passed
To which the terms applied.

Leicr. You shuffle, my lord,
Since nought was said of limit or condition.
I thought, indeed, I dealt with men of honour—

Burl. [*Indignantly.*] My lord——

Leicr. Pray hear me out; and I would ask
Forgiveness if I caused you needless pain.
For 'tis not my design to call on you,
Like honourable men, to keep your word—
I would but prove the friendship I have shown you,
And then forget that where I would have friends,
You never were amongst them.

Burl. But, my lord——

Leicr. Nay, stay. I speak but as a friend, Lord
Burleigh.

Walsm. [*Aside.*] He would not prate of friendship
now for nothing.

What's in the wind?

Leicr. Pray you, mark this again.
I have been scarce a day at Court, and, lo!

QUEEN ELIZABETH

I have unlocked the sluices of defence,
That you but fumbled at with clumsy fingers.
You owe me much for that.

Burl. For that we thank you ;
Although we choose to think the service done
For England, not for yourself, nor us.

Enter ELIZABETH, Ladies, and CLODD.

Eliz. My lords,
Your pardon that, the foes of England stirring,
I should appear inactive.

Leicr. I made free
To tell my Lord of Burleigh that your Grace
Needed some little rest.

Eliz. Rest, rest, good Leicester,
Speak not to me of rest. And yet I thank you.

Burl. Your Majesty, we pray you pardon us,
If we should speak rather as fears dictate,
Than as respect would have us. Last night you,
In audience, still were buoyed with hopes of peace ;
At sunrise came a rider hot from Plymouth
With news that up the Channel, sail on sail,
Swarms Philip's great Armada. We must now,
In terms of your own charge to us, make demand
That you shall heed our peril. Howard and Drake,
And those along with them, to whom alone
We look for our defence, have sailed with powder
For scarcely two days' work, and food so short
That our bold seamen, should they rout the Spaniard,

ACT III SCENE II

May yet be forced to strike their flag to Hunger.

Eliz. My lord, we do forgive you for your speech,
Though you would say that we have starved our sailors.
If they should suffer from our too fond hope
Of ultimate peace with Spain, pray you believe
That from the day we did accept this burden—
This heavy burden of rule—we have not once
Forgot that England, if she would be strong,
Can have no strength save she be strong at sea;
And year by year a stout ship has been built
And added to our navy. Sir John Hawkins
Will tell you that no fleet has held the seas
So taut and trim, with tackle, sails and gear
So strong to brave the elements, as ours.
And furthermore, whose stake so great as mine;
Loss so irreparable, disgrace so great,
If that you fear, but which I laugh to scorn,
Should come to pass? I tell you, those proud Dons,
Despite the blessing of the Pope, sail on
Straight to destruction.

Hunsdon. God grant your Grace
In this prove a true prophet!

Eliz. Pray, no more;
I, too, have England at my heart, good lords.
Now since you are not fighters, save where tongues
Provoke a wordy warfare, finding need
For counsel with a soldier, I despatched
Last night to summon hither my Lord of Leicester.
By him advised, I have set wide the doors
Of store and treasury. My messengers

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Have flown post-haste to Portsmouth, Plymouth, Dover;
From east to west, from north to south, the land
Rings loud with preparation; we, ourself,
This noon, escorted by our Lord of Leicester,
Review the camp at Tilbury, where the men
Of Essex, Kent, and Hertford are disposed
To guard our capital. Pray you, good lords,
Use zeal, each in his office.

[She intimates with gesture that audience is over.]

[To LEICESTER.] You, my lord,
On whom it is our purpose to bestow,
As captain of our forces, some high title
Deserving of your merit, we will detain.

Walsm. [Aside to BURLEIGH, as they move away.]

What's this? I would that I could fathom it.
The Queen is mad.

Burl. Hush, hush! 'tis but a spark.
Blown on, 'twould burst in flame. We'll bide our time.
[Exeunt Council and Ladies.]

Eliz. You, also, my good Clodd.

Clodd. I fly, your Grace.
I did but linger, thinking that brother Rob,
Fresh from the study of philosophy,
Might guess, perchance, the answer to a riddle
I thought I had in mind, but now, I fear,
Has slipped me.

Eliz. Riddle! no time for riddles, this;
Begone.

Clodd. [Walking off thoughtfully.] It was a most divert-
ing one,

ACT III SCENE II

What I remember on 't.

[Stops, and raises his hand to his brow.

It had to do

With a most crafty ass—it rhymed—and grass,
Sweetest of provender—and—mouldy hay—

[LEICESTER starts.

But—

Eliz. God's blood, Clodd!

Clodd. Farewell, dear brother Rob. *[Exit.*

Eliz. Clodd's not the only fool about the Court—
Would I might whip them all.

Leicr. I oft have itched

To give that knave a drubbing.

Eliz. Now, my lord,

We will not talk of fools, 'tis too near home.

*[She approaches LEICESTER, and after a pause
addresses him with increasing emotion.*

What do men say of me? Hark you, though I wear
A face that fronts the world with fearless eyes,
My heart is sad. . . . I play too much the queen:
Say, Leicester, do you hold me still a woman?

Leicr. Your Grace, I have in mind a far-off time
When that gaunt prison-house, the Tower, contained
A very perfect woman. Those grim gates
Did cruelly by her when they let her pass
To that high place which set her life apart
From womanly hope and love.

Eliz. I have paid dear
For queenship—to be widow who never had
A husband: to be child-reft who never knew

QUEEN ELIZABETH

The patter of baby hands upon my breast.

Leicr. Your Grace has all this nation for your children:
They love you as no sovereign has been loved
In all the world before.

Eliz. They are, my lord,
A mighty troublous brood—have all the faults
That grow in households where, the father dead,
The birch is in abeyance.

Leicr. Nay, your Grace,
Such trouble is in the air, and you who strove
For peace. . . .

Eliz. [*Silences him with a gesture, then with agitation.*]
It often has been mine to speak
The word that heard awry had let loose war;
To look on them I loved and speak as queen
What I as woman wept with many tears.
As to the matter I have now to speak on— [*Pauses.*]
It is not new betwixt us. . . . I would fain . . .
Can you not leap to it—spare me need for words . . .
Have I not, even in this, betrayed myself?
Does not my heart show through . . . O, speak, my lord!

Leicr. This is a very madness. [*Aside.*]
Pray your grace?

Eliz. [*Passionately.*] Alas! my lord, this is the utter
depth
And last indignity of sovereignty.
I'll speak plain words, so you shall understand.
A man who is a lover lightly loses;
A woman's wooing, if she prosper not,
Is a fierce flame that sears her soul for ever.

ACT III SCENE II

. . . There was a time when all your enemies
Accused you of ambition. I knew well
The point you aimed at. Tell me, must I think
Your soul, too mercenary, feared the risk
Of Love's refusal lest you thereby lost
A profitable friendship? There were times
When I held off, but to be hotlier wooed—
The very thing you sought was in your hand,
And, seized, it had been yours.

Leicr. Had I but known!

Eliz. You would have known, had you been what I
thought you.

But see, I place it in your hand again, *[Kneels.]*
I am the suppliant now, and you the king.

Leicr. Your Majesty, it is too late. . . . I—

Eliz. Nay, *[Rising.]*

It shall not be too late. Take courage, man,
I know your enemies—they are mine, too.
What! friends most dear I'll hold as enemies
Who, all else furthering, fail to help us here,
Blind to the good of the nation.

Leicr. Pray, your Grace,

Let me but make confession—

Eliz. Rob, 'tis I

Who should confess to you. Have I not scorned
The thing I beg for now?

Leicr. Alas! There stands

Between us now an obstacle—

Eliz. What power

In all this realm can stand against the Queen?

QUEEN ELIZABETH

An obstacle!—it shall be swept away.
No more, my lord, I will not hear a word.
The thing is done, and I resume the queen ;
The woman I was must stop at home and pray.
We, now, my Rob, in common duty linked
Must think of England's danger.

Leicr. [*Kneeling.*] O, my Queen !
By all that you hold dear, I pray you heed me.
I am a man to whom temptation comes
Undoubtingly and confident. If now
I speak not that which trembles on my tongue,
God be my witness—

Eliz. [*Laughs.*] Nay, I will not hear.
We would not see our consort on his knees ;
I have forgotten what I just now said,
And will forget it till the happy bells
Clashing through all the land for victory,
Shall herald for you and me, sweet wedding peals . .
Now you'll have heart to face the council, Rob !

[*She laughs. Exit QUEEN.*]

Leicr. Do I then, as she said, hold that in hand
Which once I strove and schemed for? Men, ere this,
Have bought a crown with blood, and when the sum
Of all their deeds was struck, and they were judged,
Some condonation has been found for them
In that they did of good. . . . What's this? I speak
As though I had already done the deed
Elizabeth thrusts upon me. What dire fate
Makes that sweet wife who loves me for myself
The last impediment to my ambition?

ACT III SCENE II

. . . But now I'll put that by; to-morrow brings
A balm to-day knows not the secret of:
Or, better, forget. . . Ere need comes to remember,
This house of England may have crumbled down,
And Philip of Spain, a conqueror at our gates,
Have brought a sharp solution to it all.

Enter Attendant.

Attendant. My lord, her Majesty awaits you.

*[He turns and walks towards top centre of stage.
Scenery opens and discloses the QUEEN on
horseback, with silver breastplate and helmet,
drawn sword in hand; officers grouped
near. A Groom is leading a charger
towards LEICESTER. LEICESTER mounts.]*

Eliz.

Come,

Good Rob! Why I could almost wish, my friends,
That Philip of Spain should by some chance evade
Our vigilant fleets, to prove our valour on land.
He'd find a nut too hard to crack, methinks.
But now, my soldiers, forward. I, the Queen,
Will lead you, with God's help, to victory.
The dogs of war are loose! Who's for the Queen?

*[Bugles sound. Soldiers cheer and wave their
swords. The QUEEN moves forward, fol-
lowed by LEICESTER.]*

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *The Strand.*

MISTRESS BARTON *at her door, and* POTTS *the vintner.*

Potts.

THERE'S so much a-foot, men have no time to drink.

Barton. La! Master Potts, men cannot always drink.

Potts. There's rumours enough of fighting, and wrecks, and deaths, but no news. They say my Lord Admiral has come to see the Queen; that the Dons of Spain have fled to the northern seas with old John Hawkins at their heels. Have you heard nothing, Mistress; you have a friend at Court?

Barton. [*Simpering.*] A friend at Court? Ay, that I have, a right good worthy gentleman.

Potts. I hope he is a worthy gentleman. These gallants from the Court are——

Barton. Master Robert Laneham is no empty gallant, but a servant of the state, high in the favour of my Lord of Leicester.

Potts. Ah, Leicester. What's this to-do about my Lord of Leicester? Yesterday the Queen would have hanged him: to-day she is going to marry him. He does not know when he is a happy man. But who comes here?

QUEEN ELIZABETH

He walks as one who perambulates a city of the dead. The Queen is at Westminster, my good sir, and every Tom, Dick, and Harry has gone to shout and shy up his cap for her. Now, if he have a civil tongue in his head, and be willing to wag it, there's a cup o' sack waiting for him. Yet, if he would pay for it, I would not baulk him.

Enter Mariner.

Good day, sir.

Mariner. Good day? A pesky thirsty day.

Potts. A man of spirit. [*Aside.*—You have reached port, sir.

Mariner. You say well, but would do better to serve that same port in a pint pot.

Potts. I mean, sir, if one has a thirst, here is a place where it may be worthily quenched, and at a reasonable charge.

Mariner. Good host, I seek an inn where men sink not To the deep infamy of asking payment.

You see me drawn towards the river bank;
Think of it, friend, one who hath fought for the Queen,
Compelled to quench his thirst with such a draught.

Potts. This augurs well for news. [*Aside.*—Cheer up, my man, to use Thames water for such a purpose were to run counter to Providence. Sit you here. Shall it be sack?

Mariner. [*Seating himself.*] A gallon of it, friend. [*Exit POTTS.*] Your pardon, Madam. [*He rises and bows.*] I never knew till now thirst so afflicting that it blinded me to beauty.

ACT IV SCENE I

Barton. La, sir! when a man hath been in foreign parts and seen the beauties of Spain, wherefore should he seek to flatter us poor women of England?

Mariner. Women of England! if I have seen a beauty of Spain, or of the Netherlands either, who dare hold a candle to what I now observe, may the Dons roast me alive when they catch me. Now it is easy for me to do what many have thought impossible, and with the evidence of my own eyes, too: namely, to enumerate the points which go the making of beauty. But mine host returneth.

Barton. Nay, say on. Master Potts is not one that hurrieth. I know beforehand I shall not believe a word of it.

Mariner. Well then, the points be these—

Enter POTTS with a flagon which Mariner empties at a draught.

Most excellent Potts, if this is a foretaste of the wine with which it is thy intention to slake my thirst, I will commend thee to all my friends.

Potts. [*Looking ruefully into the empty flagon.*] But hast thou no news? Art thou not from the fleet?

Mariner. If I have not given thee most eloquent testimony of that same, put me to proof with a larger measure. A jug, friend, a jug! I would prove its quality in the bulk.

[*POTTS retires hesitatingly with empty measure.*]

Barton. [*Approaching.*] What wast thou about to say?

Mariner. I wait but thy command to continue. There be some, poor judges they, who run after your thin slips of girls—sanguine souls who look but for promise. Now

QUEEN ELIZABETH

others, and I make bold to count myself among the number, infinitely prefer the fulfilment, and what I would have I would see with my bodily eyes. As thus—

Barton. I fear thou hast a most wicked tongue.

Mariner. Her face should have no wrinkle; she should smile with eyes and lips; and she should by most winsome tricks gain that which she desires by seeming to desire it not. She should in no way be shaped corner-wise, or angular, but——

Enter Potts.

Most excellent Potts, thou dost remind me that once returned with Sir Francis Drake, I sat me outside an inn—as this might be—at Plymouth, and thrice did I send mine host—he was such an one as thou—puffing and panting to fill such a measure as this (mayhap, a trifle larger), ere that thirst, contracted on the salt seas, was finally cured. Thou shalt not be baulked of thy good intention, excellent Potts.

Potts. This fellow will give no news under a hogshead. [*Aside.*]—Friend, if thou hast, as thou sayest, come from the fleet, tell us somewhat of 'the fight with the Spanish king's ships. [*He re-fills flagon from jug.*

Barton. I can see from thy face thou art a valiant man, and one of those her Majesty is much beholden to.

Mariner. Right there, mistress, but I am also a most modest man; moderate in all things. [*Potts looks into empty jug.*] And what I do, I leave to others to recount. Yet when I think of what I have gone through I wonder much that I am here to tell the tale.

ACT IV SCENE I

Barton. Thou didst risk thy life?

Potts. I do not believe thou knowest a ship of war from a Thames lighter. Thou art no sailor.

Mariner. But that this sack is good, and the next thou wilt bring shall be better still, thou shouldst die for that saying.

Barton. Master Potts! Master Potts! Good sir, he meant nothing.

Mariner. For thy sake, fair mistress, then, will I pass it, and though my soul be wounded by the calumny, yet will I tell thee somewhat of the late happenings on the sea.

You see in me Lord Seymour's sailing-master;
When news came up from Plymouth that the Dons
At last were in the Channel; that for miles
Was nought but mighty galleons, castled poops
With gilded vanes and railings, flags and pennons;
We were at Chatham, kicking heels and swearing,
Awaiting orders, which at last arrived,
We got our stores in and such ammunition
As it should please her Grace to put in scale
Against the hazard of England. Late at night,
Slipped down upon the ebb-tide, we stood off
The Foreland, heavy of heart, lest of the work
Should nought be left for us to do. Next day
We stood across for Calais, and there saw,
As through a hundred gaps in a hedge of mist,
The Spaniards, like a flock of worried sheep,
Racing for Calais Roads, close on their heels
The English ships—the cause of all their haste.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

These casting anchor too, observed their foes
As baffled wolves the safely-folded sheep,
For so their poverty they had not left
Powder and shot to venture in among them.
The Lord High Admiral cursed upon his ship,
Baulked of his prey; and Frobisher and Hawkins,
Both helpless, chafed and cursed on theirs, till Drake,
Swearing as none but men of Devon can,
Ceased on a sudden, and with face a-flush,
With laughter in his eyes, went over the side,
And in a cock-boat sought the Admiral.
Soon signal-flags went fluttering up and down;
We watched, and scarce dare speak. Then when night
fell,

Between our swinging lines eight silent ships,
With never a light on board, as though borne forth
Dead from the ranks of life to their dark burial,
Bore slowly down to where the great Armada
With countless dancing lights at anchor rode.
Then suddenly all the eight shot tongues of flame
From port and hold; flames licked the tar-soaked decks,
And writhed up shroud and mast. From slumber snatched,
The Spaniards gazed with horror at the sight,
And with loud cries cut cables, hoisted sail,
And scattered in wild dismay to right and left.
We with Lord Seymour, fresh and hungry for fight,
Hung on their flying rear the whole night through,
Herding them northward ever, against the dawn,
Which come, while yet their lanterns sickly yellow
Glared drowsily on bow and yard and poop,

ACT IV SCENE I

Began forthwith, with changing wind and sea,
A never-changing butchery. What were they—
The huge hidalgos of the Spanish Main—
Against our English ships which, smartly handled,
Engaged but when we would?

Enter LANEHAM, ridiculously over-dressed.

How all that day
We fought until we wearied of the slaughter;
How those proud ships, when they could fight no more,
Fell out and settled down with decks a-wash;
Their shattered masts involved in tangled ruin;
Their scuppers running blood, each splintered hull,
Fast leaking, cooping yet within its walls
A thousand desperate men who laughed at death;
How those proud ships, I say, left to their fate,
Wallowed like stricken monsters on the tide,
Until in huge convulsion, final gasp,
They sank, and no man knows where now they lie—
I will not tell lest I should weary you.

Laneham. [*To MRS. BARTON.*] I have stood here, I
think, at least an hour,
And gained no notice, so hath this impostor
Enslaved your ear.

Barton. [*To LANEHAM.*] Nay, nay, friend, no impostor!
[*To Mariner.*] I pray you, gallant sir, we are all attention.

Mariner. I thank you, mistress, for your courtesy;



QUEEN ELIZABETH

But I am hungry, so must needs move on.

[*To* LANEHAM.] My lord, I saw you not. I pray your pardon. [*They bow.*]

Barton. I would, sir, for your welcome entertainment,
Save better fare awaits you farther on,
That you would take with me such poor refreshment
As now is toward.

[LANEHAM *making gesture of disapproval, whispers to* MISTRESS BARTON.

Mariner. I thank you kindly, mistress,
The fare were poor, indeed, that at your board
Were not a royal banquet.

Barton. Pray you, sir,
And Master Laneham, follow. I'll prepare. [*Exit.*]

Mariner. And so the wind blows there. [*Aside, laughs.*
After your lordship. [*Bows.*]

Laneham. [*Moving towards door.*] You are from the
fleet, good sir.

Mariner. Just come ashore,
And now would see the sights, for rumour goes,
Her Highness in her gratitude to Heaven
For this great victory wrought by us poor seamen,
Bestows high honours on the Earl of Leicester.

Laneham. [*Loftily.*] I am his lordship's—friend, and
would not hear
A question of his worth.

Mariner. I pray your pardon.

[*Both enter* MISTRESS BARTON'S house.]

ACT IV SCENE I

Enter CLODD supporting COUNTESS OF LEICESTER.

'Tis a most fortunate meeting, yet, dear lady,
In my poor foolish heart I can but think
You had been happier home at Kenilworth.

Countess. I could not help it; truly, I feared more
To stay at home than come. Believe me, Clodd,
It was no sudden whim that brought me here;
And when they told me at his house my lord
Was stricken down, I thanked God in my heart
For having brought me, till the serving-man
Forbade my entry—swearing he knew me not.
Say, why am I refused my husband's house?

Clodd. I know not, lady; faith, how could I know?
Yet, if you think, none but a trusted few
Know you as Leicester's wife. The serving-man
Beheld in you a stranger and, no doubt,
He hath strict orders to deny all entrance
Save to the physician.

Countess. Is he then so ill?

Clodd. Ill must he be for you to be denied.

Countess. What must I do? I'll back to Kenilworth.

Clodd. Nay, now you owe a duty to yourself;
And other duties greater than you know.
You must acquaint the Queen of Leicester's illness,
And she will see you righted, fear you not.
The great thanksgiving service now is over,
And from it to the Hall at Westminster
Her Highness goes by boat. 'Tis not far hence;
We'll seek an audience ere she holds her court.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

At but a hint of your news she'll hear you out,
Trust a fool's word for that. Hush—Master Laneham!

Enter LANEHAM from MISTRESS BARTON'S house. He hesitates at the sound of laughter within.

Laneham. A murrain on this smooth-tongued mariner;
She has no eyes for me, but listens rapt
To all his braggart stories of the sea;
His wrecks and sackings and the valorous things
He did with Drake at Faro. But for fear
She'd thank me not, I would have called him "liar,"
And kicked him out of doors. Now I think on't,
There is no pressing need for me at Westminster;
I'll sit the rascal out. [*He turns and faces CLODD.*

Clodd. Well met, my lord
Of doors and key-holes.

Laneham. Master Clodd!

Clodd. 'Tis I;
I press thy service in the name of Folly.
We go to Westminster, come you with us,
And help us through the crowds. Dost know this lady?

Laneham. [*Looks at her closely, then starts back.*]
'Tis——

Clodd. One whom thou hast never seen before,
And therefore one whose name thou dost not know.
Let us proceed, my lady.

[*Renewed laughter within. LANEHAM stops and listens.*

Laneham, come. [Exeunt:

ACT IV.

SCENE II. *Westminster Hall.*

Throne, on a high dais, approached by wide steps. Flourish of trumpets and cheers of crowd in distance without.

Enter, top centre, Soldiers, Beef-eaters, Courtiers; and from right, members of her Majesty's Council.

Howard. Have you so failed, my lords, that while with
ships
Starved to the smallest pinch of shot and powder,
We drove the fleets of Spain from off the seas,
You could not stay her most infatuate step
Of ministering thus to Leicester's greed and pride?
Had you no tongues to say it should not be?

Burl. Tongues, tongues, my lord, you know the use of
tongues
To turn her Grace's mind from foolishness.

Howard. What is the "Lord Lieutenant of the Realm"
But king uncrowned. King Robert Dudley rule us?

Burl. We had remained away in sign of protest
Against this foolish step but that her Grace
Upon the point of action often sees
Its consequence, and rating those who dare
To deem her folly, folly, stays her hand.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

That's our one hope.

Howard. [*Impatiently.*] Have you no hope but hope?

Walsm. We have not idled. Nay, if Fortune help us,
We yet may trip my Lord of Leicester's feet.

Howard. That's more to the point.

Walsm. [*Taking HOWARD a little aside.*] 'Tis this.

At breakfast-time

I got vague tidings that the Earl was married ;
Had long been so in private. Proof of that,
Even at this hour which sees the last trick played,
Will be the winning card.

Howard. You've told the Queen?

Walsm. I do not think even you would dare do that.
What if it proved untrue?

Howard. It must be true !

O heavenly powers ! give us but proof in time,
And we by Folly shall be saved from Folly.

Enter COUNTESS OF LEICESTER, CLODD, and LANEHAM.

*Flourish of trumpets, and cheers drawing closer,
outside.*

Clodd. Dear lady, 'tis too late for us to see
Her Majesty in private. Master Laneham,
Go you and bid Lord Burleigh come to us,
And Walsingham, and the Lord Admiral.

Countess. O pray you, Clodd, not the Lord Admiral ;
He is my kinsman and he loves me well ;
Now he will hate me as he hates my husband.

Clodd. He is an honest man ; there's virtue in that.

ACT IV SCENE II

Who ever knew him beat about the bush.

[Roars of cheers round entrance, and cries of "God bless your Majesty!" to which the QUEEN is heard to reply: "And you, too, my people, God bless you all!"

Enter in state, Heralds and great officials, with SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON and others, then ELIZABETH, followed by her Ladies and retinue.

Howard. What's this, good Clodd?

Clodd. Your niece, my lord, would speak
A word in your private ear.

[COUNTESS whispers. BURLEIGH and WALSHINGHAM join them.

Howard. What, Leicester ill!

Burl. I would not risk my head to tell the Queen,
And yet I would she could be made to know it.

[The QUEEN being seated on throne, enter deputation from the House of Commons. They kneel; the Speaker hands her an Address, at which she glances.

Eliz. We thank you, Mr. Speaker, and our Commons,
For this most timely proof of loyalty.
And yet we can but think it had been well
If you had spoken less of liberty
And more of Providence, to whom the nation
Owes safety at this moment. Pray you rise.
We have given thanks to God for His great mercy
Lately vouchsafed to us—*[Hands Address to HATTON.]—*
and now would show

QUEEN ELIZABETH

What brought this trouble to head. Some twelve months
since

Peace was impossible, for, in our midst,
Was still that source of black conspiracy,
The Queen of Scots. She, tried by law, and doomed,
Repeatedly respited, still incorrigible,
Was put at last to death. If you in this
Saw blame, bear well in mind how, breathed by her,
Black mildew of treason spread from heart to heart
Of those we loved; how peace lived hand to mouth
But by the deaths of those whose lives had gone
Rightlier to its ensuring. Know you, too,
That after Mary's death a list was found
In her own hand of those who held themselves—
Knights, squires and noblemen—with their estates
And powers set duly forth—in readiness
To rise in rash rebellion at her call.

This list was given to us—we glanced it down, [*Sensation.*
Read some few names until, for blinding tears,
We could no more, for many we held our friends,
And some we loved. Then scorning all advice
To punish their black default—we burnt the paper.

[*Sensation.*

To Francis Drake we owe that that fierce point
Aimed at the nation's heart was for a year
Parried and thrust aside, in that he burst
The doors of Philip's ports, burnt ships and stores,
And singed his very beard. Then when at last
The Great Armada came, but for God's mercy,
And the undreamt-of valour of our sailors,

ACT IV SCENE II

This English realm no longer had remained
An isle of liberty shut round by storms,
The dear ensample of maturing nations,
The hate and envy of a world enslaved;
And though now she, proved mistress of the seas,
Is mistress of her fate, we call to mind
How oft our Lords and Commons in the past
Impressed upon us that this realm hath need
Of manly guidance; we, at all such times
Agreeing with them, enjoined them seek for us
A consort willing to yield conformity
With all the ancient customs of this realm,
And with religion as reformed and cleansed
By our great sire. They found him not abroad,
And since these troublous times their counsel proves
In essence but too true, we will, instead,
To single out a valiant lord at home
To stand beside us, closer than our Council;
To set him firmly in authority
As second to ourself alone; bestow
On him such tenure that high treason only,
Not our sole pleasure, shall divest him of it.
Now, should we ask you who in these late troubles
The nation looked to as its natural leader,
And who by gifts of mind and princeliness
Is fittest for this kingly dignity,
You would all answer in loud unison,
That Robert, Earl of Leicester, is the man. [*Sensation.*]
Therefore do we, as fountain of all honour,
As wielder of all power—this kingdom's head—

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Invest him with the title of Lord Lieutenant
Of England, Wales and Ireland.

[*The Council whisper together anxiously. The
Heralds step forth.*

[*To the Heralds.*] Stay you yet;
We also would proclaim our fixed resolve
To take as consort—with due limitations
Of power and dignity—this said Lord Leicester.

[*Movement in the assembly. The COUNTESS OF
LEICESTER seizes LORD ADMIRAL'S arm.*

Wherefore, declared our will, we pray you all
Make intercession with Almighty God
For blessing to the nation from our union.

[*The Heralds slowly take position before the
throne.*

Countess. My lord, most reverend kinsman, I must
speak.

I have to say that which must now be heard.

Howard. Nay, hold your peace. If Leicester answer
not,

And you know well he will not, that will end it.

[*BURLEIGH joins them.*

Countess. Even that will shame her, and who loves the
Queen

Would spare her also that; but there is more—
Much more—which if you knew you, too, my lords,
Would reckon silence crime.

Burl. Not now, not now;
You do not know her Highness in this mood.
All opposition, show of contrary will,

ACT IV SCENE II

Do but confirm her. She is like a kite,
And cannot soar but in the teeth of the wind.

[COUNTESS *pushes forward*. HOWARD and
BURLEIGH *attempt to detain her*.

Countess. Unhand me, lords, for I am Leicester's wife.

[*They loose her with amazement. She rushes forward and throws herself at the foot of the throne. The Heralds sound their trumpets.*

Herald. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Baron Denbigh—

Countess. [*To Herald.*] In God's name cease. Your Majesty, I pray—

Eliz. [*Interrupts.*] What's this: why you, my Lady Douglas Sheffield!

Have you forgot in absence from our Court
The manners that obtain here. Stand aside:
We cannot hear you now.

[*Two Ladies come forward whom she permits to lead her a little aside.*

Step forth, my lord,

We would make instant earnest of our will.

[*Passing bell tolls in distance.*

Countess. [*Putting Ladies aside.*] He will not come; he cannot come, your Grace.

I speak for him who am his wedded wife.

Eliz. Why, this is madness, you poor fool. I knew
My Lord of Leicester played with you. Maybe
He hath deceived you; faith, we can forgive him,
Tempted by such a face. Did you not guess

QUEEN ELIZABETH

That having worn you he would put you by?
My Lord of Leicester knew the game too well
To fling a crown away for such as you.
Stand back. . . . He is by accident delayed;
[*To Heralds.*] Sound you again.

[*Heralds sound. A Messenger hurries in and whispers to BURLEIGH, who turns and whispers to HOWARD. Bell tolls.*

He will be here anon;
Go you and bid them cease that dismal tolling.
On such a day our subjects should not die.

[*HOWARD goes forward and kneels.*

Howard. I pray your Grace's pardon. . . . Though
you stop

That bell you may not stay the thing it mourns.
The Earl of Leicester even now lies dead,
Waiting to answer another trump than yours.

Eliz. The Earl of Leicester dead!

Countess.

Dead!

[*Bell tolls. COUNTESS falls back into arms of attendant Ladies.*

Eliz. [*With emotion, after an evident struggle with herself.*]

Bear her hence.

This loss is hers, not mine. . . . I may not weep,
Even that poor office is denied me now,
Which I had given my crown to claim as right.
But God shall be my witness—I, a queen,
Ruler and judge of my people—that never I knew
Or dreamt of this which now has come to light—
My Lord of Leicester's marriage with this lady.

ACT IV SCENE II

Yet now recalling what but late he said,
I think he would have told me had I let him.
But God made blind my eyes and stiff my neck,
That in the moment of high victory
I should be humbled. [*Bell tolls.*

Fitter had it been
Had I gone forth to-day with downcast mien,
Worn sackcloth, scattered ashes on my head,
And doffed my earthly crown. How have I sinned,
My lords, how have I sinned?
[BURLEIGH *kneeling at her feet kisses the hem of
her robe.*

Burl. Your Majesty,
Pray you be comforted.

Eliz. Nay, nay, my lords,
Not now. If by your counsels this has come,
If we have stood opposed to God's high will,
And fought against Him, seek you, too, forgiveness.
But no; I am unjust. The sin is mine;
I recognize the hand of God in all.
Here do I tear aside all vain pretence,
And stand, save for my sin, naked before Him.

[*Bell tolls.*
[*She rises.*
O God, is there no melting of Thine anger?
Is this Thy judgment for my black transgression?
I who have seen in this great people's rule
But mine own glory; in Thy dreadful wrath,
That swept from off the seas the hosts of Spain,
Who were Thine enemies scarce more than I,
But confirmation of my power. I pray

QUEEN ELIZABETH

That all Thy judgments due be poured on me—
On me alone, who am this nation's head,
And I, henceforth, if Thou shouldst grant me grace,
Will see in this great people, husband, children,
Living for Thee alone, O God! and them
Whom Thou hast set apart to rule the seas,
And given into their hands the sovereignty
Of nations far beyond the ocean's rim.
And you, my people, you will pray for me—
I feared this loneliness wherein I live,
This barren solitude of sovereignty;
And as a woman I did stretch my hand
For but a share—a little share of that
So long denied—and now shall never be mine—
A little love. [*Bell tolls.*

He was, indeed, my friend,
And once I think he loved me. . . . Leicester dead!
[*Bell tolls. She falls upon her knees.*

CURTAIN.

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'The black insurgent blood of ancient murder,'
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